Red Meekins

W.A. Fraser

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To E. S. Robertson
With sincere regards
from the author-
W. A. Fraser.
Toronto, Nov. 18th, 1921.

Of a book provides one's
dinner and hopes
one's friends there
is nothing more
to be said.
W. A. Fraser.

RED MEEKINS

W. A. FRASER


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RED MEEKINS

BY

W. A. FRASER

AUTHOR OF "BULLDOG CARNEY," "THE THREE SAPPHIRES,"
"THE LONE FURROW," "THOROUGHBREDS," ETC.

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RED MEEKINS

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I

FOOL'S GOLD

CHAPTER I

THE withering blight of pinched-out veins had fallen upon Silver City. Like skeleton monuments to buried hopes a dozen hoist derricks stood silently upon the bald, glaciated hills.

Upon the veranda of a low-crouching log building, from which hung, at an angle, a board carrying the words, "Trout's Hotel," stood its owner gazing dejectedly down the deserted street.

The scheme of Peloo Trout's physical architecture lent itself admirably to dejection. His huge, gaunt frame was topped by a headpiece that well might have been posed for a full-whiskered gargoyle. He spat a derisive jet of tobacco juice out to the roadway, and, dropping into a chair beside a heavy-shouldered man with an emblazoned crest, voiced his pessimistic deductions: "This town's deader'n a doornail—do you sabe that, Mr. Red Meekins?"

"If I had the dough, I'd pull my freight for the

Badger gold fields," Meekins declared. "Wish some sucker'd drop into town an' grubstake me."

"I'd stake you if I could sell this hash joint."

"Advertise," Meekins advised laconically.

"I did. I put a notice on a board, an' Lucky Flynn shot it to smithereens. He allowed the name Peloo looked like a string of bull's-eyes. Hello! Here comes your sucker now, Red."

A wagon was coming up the street. It stopped in front of the hotel, and two men descended. "One of 'em is that French half-breed, Felix Dubois," Peloo said, "but the man in pantalettes is a new one on me."

There was something pantherlike about the half-breed's movements as he lifted to the ground their travelling outfit. His slim, wiry frame moved with the subtle, undulating strength of a steel coil. His eyes were black—fiercely black, and as predatory as his thin, hawk nose. The useful prospector's garb, khaki pants, brown leather shoe packs, and short Mackinaw coat contrasted with the elaborate tourist gear that his companion had evidently acquired of a London outfitter.

Peloo welcomed the half-breed when the two came up the veranda, saying: "Hope you're well, M'sieu Felix."

"I'm fine, me," Dubois answered. "Dis is M'sieu St. John, from London; m'sieu is beeg man for buy mine. Dis is M'sieu Peloo Trout." Meekins was swept into the introduction as he rose to depart.

The stranger tendered Peloo a card, and Trout

threaded his way laboriously through the labyrinthian legend:

Mr. George Cawthra Sackville St. John.

Not to be outdone in courtesy, he plunged his huge hand into a capacious pocket and fished out a pasteboard which carried the concise announcement:

MR. PELOO TROUT,
Mining Broker.

"That's my main bus'ness—brokerin'," Peloo advised; "this hotel's more on the side."

Felix, all on the alert, asked: "Where dat minin' engineer, Sam Wallace?"

"Lit out," Peloo answered tersely.

"Dave Lane—he here?" Felix queried.

Peloo drew a massive hand down his whiskers, and delivered a comprehensive answer that took cognisance of questions to come: "There ain't nobody here, an' there'll be fewer next week. This town's closed for the season."

"Really! What are we to do?" St. John asked.

The restless breed was shuffling his shoe packs on the floor with a rasping, restless impatience: "By gar, dat some minin' town widout no minin' man!"

"You see," the placid voice of St. John took up, "I am on my way to inspect a property of Mr. Dubois's, and I expected to get Mr. Wallace or Mr. Lane to go with us."

"Why didn't you bring an engineer from Toronto?" Peloo asked.

"Non!" Felix declared contemptuously. "De good man he's all at de mines; dere's 'bout fifty t'ousand minin' engineers lef' in Toronto don' know gol' from brass. M'sieu St. John he's been introduce' to me by frien' who tol' heem 'bout my gol' mine. I show heem de speciman——" Here Dubois thrust into Peloo's hand the specimen. It was the size of an egg, very beautiful, the yellow golden metal plastered between creamy white quartz. "Dat's fine, eh, Peloo? I got forty acre of dat."

"About the engineer——" St. John suggested.

"Yes," Felix, switching back, continued, "disfriend', who is beeg man in Toronto, recommen' M'sieu Wallace or Dave Lane."

"This puts us in a hat, Mr. Trout. No doubt Mr. Dubois can show me, as he says, acres of gold, but Londoners are conservative—they'd insist on seeing a report."

"That gold wouldn't do 'em, eh, Mr.—er—ah?" Peloo queried.

"Not at all. Anybody having a five-pound share in the company couldn't come all the way out here to look at the gold, could he?"

St. John's query was punctuated by a squeal from Felix, upon whose toe Peloo had pressed an enormous boot. As he glared at Trout he saw the latter's right eye close and then pop open, unshielding a look that conveyed something. The something developed immediately.

"Well, mister, there ain't a engineer that I'd

trust furder'n you'd sling a bull by the tail within a hundred miles of this sweet village except Mr. Meekins."

If it had not been for the crushed toe and the little bead eye that was even now telegraphing, Felix would have rolled on the floor, convulsed with laughter. Inwardly he was muttering: *"Nom du chien!* Red Meekins—engineer!"

"The gentleman who has just left us?" St. John queried.

"That's him, an' he's a hustler from 'way back. He's got 'em all skinned when it comes to holdin' his ear to the ground; he jus' talks secrets to old earth."

Peloo had a feeling that Felix was ready to expostulate, so he kept up his eulogy of Meekins. "Red is known from the Klondike to Mexico. Why, he staked the Pink Eye Mine an' the Spotted Dog; I wouldn't put a dollar into a prospect without Meekins see it first. He's practical. Some of 'em School of Mines grafters comes up here with a 'M. E.' after their names an' go out an' give a stone quarry a diploma, till you'd think it was a drawin'-room with gold statues. They get the strike an' the tip an' the calcites an' the quartzites all wrote in sweet an' proper in the certif'cate, an' down in Toronto the people fight for the shares. Over in Cobalt there was about a thousand comp'nies sold stock to the woolly public, an' every one of 'em comp'nies had a jim-dandy report signed by some M. E., an' about twenty mines made good. Now,

Meekins ain' like that; he's practical. He knows a mine from a moose yard, an' there ain't money enough in Silver City to bribe him."

"My dear sir," St. John offered, "I'm afraid that a strictly *practical* man, you know, would hardly be the proper person. I should require a report technically convincing."

"An' that's what you'll get from Mr. Meekins—technically O. K. When I say he's *practical* I don't mean he's got to quarry all the mineral out of a mine before he can tell you what's there. No, siree, Mr. Meekins is a jim-dandy engineer—none better."

St. John made no comment, and Peloo added briskly: "I'll see him about it; I'm kind of feared he's pretty busy."

After supper Peloo, Meekins, and Dubois met in a little room while St. John smoked his pipe on the veranda.

"Show Red that chunk of metal, Felix," Peloo commanded.

Dubois passed the gold quartz to Meekins, and Peloo added: "You ain't no prospector, Felix, as I ever heerd of; how'd you come by this find?"

"I was killin' fur—trappin'," the Frenchman snapped.

"Do you think, Red, that Felix found that family plate while he was snarin' rabbits?"

"What you mean?" Felix was angry.

"That specimen never come from the surface, Felix, an' if you put that over on the Englisher——"

Dubois spat in a catlike rage. "You t'ink I'm wan fool, m'sieu?"

"Me an' Red wouldn't be wastin' time here if we thought that, Felix. But we're goin' to be honest; we ain't goin' to rob nobody but the stranger, an' there's no use totin' the gent off into the woods if there's no stuff like that on your claim. Me an' Red ain't got morals enough between the two of us to stake an ordinary preacher, but if you ain't got the gold we're not in on it even against an outsider."

"Ver' kind, M'sieu Peloo," Dubois said sarcastically; "an' if my mine is good wan, your engineer, M'sieu Meekins, will say so an' get beeg fee, eh? Oh, *nom de Dieu!* Red Meekins is engineer for inspec' my property!" And he leaned back in his chair and cackled.

Meekins turned to Trout, growling: "I ain't no engineer; I never said I was."

"Yes, you are," Peloo declared. "It's knowin' things, not diplomas, that makes an engineer worth a hang. There ain't a mineral-bearin' rock that you don't know the name of; there ain't one of 'em that wouldn't get up on its hind legs an' say, 'Hello, Red,' if you was to meet. The kid rocks like Huronian an' conglomerate, an' the gran'pa rocks, diabase an' granite—why, you've slept with 'em. An' as to gold, the old saying' goes, 'Gold is where you find it.' "

"But when it come to writin' the geol'gy of 'em rocks I'd be a laugh."

Peloo leaned forward, and, shaking a long finger in the speaker's face, said dramatically: "That's where I come in, Red. You gather up the macadam on Felix's gold farm an' tell me what the chunks is an' I'll write out the family hist'ry of that mine."

Red stared, and Felix clucked his tongue in his cheek. Peloo drew a large sheaf of papers from his pocket and spread them on the table. "It's as easy as peelin' onions," he asserted. "That's Professor Bluem's report on the Badger Lake country, designed an' executed all proper; an' here is a report on the Fat Hog Lake gold field. Here's five other mine reports that an engineer left in his room when he skipped out an' left me his board bill to file. Here's all 'em mineral rocks in their dress suits—schists, ankerites, dolomites"—Peloo was reading from a report. "How does it strike you now, Felix?"

"What you expec' make out of dis?" Dubois asked suspiciously.

"Red's fee'll be five hundred plunks; the buyer'll pay that as usual. My firm, Peloo Trout & Co.,'ll look to you for the commission—ten per cent; the seller always pays that."

Dubois gasped. "By gar! I don' need no broker, me; I've sol' de mine."

"No mine ain't never sold till you've got the cash, Felix. Don't be in no hurry; just let that soak in," and Peloo lighted his pipe and put the papers in his pocket.

It gradually soaked into Dubois's mind, eager to

sell his mine, that ninety per cent of the price would be better than perhaps losing it all. Smothering his anger, he said: "If M'sieu St. John is satisfy, I don' care, me."

"Then just put your autograph to this commission letter." And Peloo put in front of Dubois a document he had already prepared.

When they joined St. John on the veranda Trout explained in a charmingly offhand way that it was all settled. Mr. Meekins had agreed to go, and that, as he himself felt a kindly interest in the matter, he was also going. "You just leave it to me an' Meekins," Peloo advised; "we'll put Felix's claim in the witness box an' convict it of bein' a mine or its owner a four-flusher."

CHAPTER II

St. John felt somewhat as Felix had, a state of helplessness; he must either go forward in the hands of these seemingly capable men or go back.

As to Peloo, he simply completed arrangements —hired two guides, two canoes which he stocked with steel, dynamite, food—all that was required. The second morning they were under way.

There was a week of canoe travel; first upstream for four days to the height of land—the divide on the watershed, and then two days of swift glide down rushing waters. There were portages and rapids to run, and many things new to the Lon-

doner. At Beaver Landing, they left the canoes, and, led by Big Little Joe, the guide, packed their outfit over a trail that led across a wilderness of muskeg.

On the second day they came flat up against a rock, and when they had climbed to its top, Felix, with a whoop of joy, pointed to an old log shack, proudly announcing that that was his claim.

After they had eaten, Felix showed them his discovery vein. Originally it had shown in one small exposure, but where they stood now, as Meekins stepped it off, it was twenty-two feet in width. It was a vein of ankerite schist cut by stringers of quartz, and in these quartz stringers little beads of gold like shirt studs showed.

Felix took St. John along the outcrop of the vein, and Meekins sent Big Little Joe and his mate to bring sledges and steel to drill a row of popholes across the vein.

"There's somethin' wrong about this find of gold, Peloo," Red said. "In the first place, Felix didn't strip this vein; he's lived too long in the bush to dig a duck pond when all he'd got to do is run a smaller trench at right angles to these stringers. An' that gold specimen never come off this outcrop."

"It never come off this claim," Peloo declared.

"I believe it did. The feller that hog-rooted that earth up found a rich outcrop somewhere, an' p'raps he wouldn't tell Felix, an' I wouldn't put it past the breed to knock him on the head to steal the whole thing."

"When we was comin' over the trail," Peloo commented, "an' I was askin' Felix where we was, he ups an' says that he didn't come in this way before; that he hadn't no canoe, an' had to go way round the other way."

Little Joe had brought the sledges and steel, and Meekins drilled a number of shallow holes across the vein, blew them out with dynamite, ground a collection of rock in a mortar he had brought, and, panning the powder in the fry pan, showed St. John a fairy-like thread of gold lying along the edge of the white grit.

"She's a rich one if she only goes down deep enough," was Red's comment.

After supper Peloo built a couple of smudge fires to keep off the mosquitoes, and accompanied Meekins to the shack to help the latter with his field notes. It was an old shack that had probably been built by some trapper.

"Wonder what English had in his crop when he asked me to-day if I'd ever see a feller as looked like him out in these parts," Meekins said as he pulled inside the string that lifted the wooden latch.

"What'd you tell him?"

"I told him I'd seen a slew of 'em—dozens; an' he never give a cackle. Don't you s'pose he never catches on?"

"He's huntin' for somebody that's got lost out here, Red. Do you remember Lord Happy, that boozin' Englishman at Haileybury?"

"Yes."

"Well, from what St. John says an' asks, I believe that's the man he's after. But I ain't goin' to give nobody away till I know what's the game."

Peloo had spread his literature on the table, and Meekins, sitting opposite, had his rock samples ready.

"I can't just make out whether this is diabase or Keewatin." Red rubbed his thumb over the texture. "It's greenish gray, Peloo."

"Here she am," Peloo answered gleefully, flattening the leaves of the mining journal at a page of colored rocks. "One'd think they was twins," and, clearing his throat, he read:

"In the Badger Area some of the Keewatin rocks have escaped dynamic metamorphic agencies sufficient to show their original character; certain basalts still retain quite perfectly their amygdaloidal texture and ellipsoidal structure. Most of the Keewatin in the Badger Area consists of dark-colored or *greenish* massive or schistose rocks of basic or intermediate composition.

"That means the rock you've got in your paw, ain't it?"

"Yes, I guess she's Keewatin all right; we'll label her."

Peloo wrote out Keewatin, and it was pasted on the rock. He numbered it "I," with a corresponding number on that section of the report. "It's goin' to be easy, Red," he advised. "Besides it's on the level." He put his big paw confidently on the mining manual. "I'll bet there's a description

in this here catalogue of every kind of rock this forty acres can cough up."

Meekins pushed two fragments across the table, and after a long search Peloo read the following:

"Quartz-porphyry is, however, a rather common rock in the Badger Area. While it occurs characteristically in dikes cutting green schists, it is also found in larger masses. Certain quartz-porphyry dikes have been subjected to pressure and broken up and now resemble conglomerate. The metamorphic action has produced a dark-greenish base through which are set fragments of the porphyry."

"That's the piece that looks like head-cheese, ain't it, Red? That's quartz-porphyry."

It was duly labelled quartz-porphyry. Meekins leaned back in his chair with a tired sigh. "If you hadn't read 'em jawbreakers out of that there book, I'd 'a' called it diabase.

"Diabase—diabase?" muttered Peloo reflectively. "I see something on a back page about diabase. Here she is! Say, Red, this game's as easy as gettin' measles. Listen:

"Olivine Diabase: Several dikes of olivine diabase cutting the Keewatin have been found in this area. The olivine diabase in the Badger area is considered to be of post-middle Huronian age.

"Got some of the Olivine stuff, Red, 'cause here's its name?"

"That's diabase." Meekins rubbed his thumb over a rather smooth, greenish piece.

"We got him dead to rights, age an' all," Peloo added.

"That Olivine's new to me," Red admitted. "They call it greenstone an' let it go at that in Cobalt."

"No. 3," Peloo declared as he thumped the label on.

"I'd rather be drillin' holes out in the rock," said Red mournfully.

"You wouldn't get five hundred for it. You stick to me an' you'll be travellin' 'round the country in a flivver."

Meekins was examining with his glass a piece of rock that on one side had a rusted-iron finish, while the reverse was creamy white, with little touches of blue and green.

"What's that?" Trout asked.

"'Bout an hour ago I'd've called it gold-bearin' quartz, but since I stacked up against that book I wouldn't argue that it wasn't a doorknob off the pearly gates."

Peloo held out his hand. "Let me have it; here's a cut that looks kinder similar. I guess it's quartz all right, but we're writin' a scientific report. There you be, as good a fit as you ever see." He placed the rock beside a coloured plate for comparison. "There's her name, too, as the professors have christened her—jaspilyte. Read it, Red."

Peloo filled his pipe while Meekins waded through the following:

"Associated with the Keewatin is much iron formation. This iron formation is what is commonly called jaspilyte, and consists of thin bands of magnetite and silica, the latter being frequently red in colour."

"That piece has got 'jaspilyte' stamped on its features, ain't it, Red?"

"Hanged if I know! What's the matter with this as a finger print:

"Many of the Keewatin rocks contain considerable carbonate calcite, dolomite, or a ferruginous carbonate, giving rise to crystalline limestone which is usually rusty-weathered."

"That's kind of evidence from the other side, ain't it?" Peloo admitted.

"Yes, this 's got the rusty weatherin', an' it's crystallized all right. Seems to me that book tries to prove too much, Peloo; it gets mixed."

Meekins applied the magnifying glass to the rock in dispute. "It might be a glass eye out of a dead mummy accordin' to that book, but it carries free gold," he declared. "I guess we'll just tag this pebble gold-bearin' quartz."

"'Taint official enough," Peloo objected decisively. "That's what every trail musher says when he brings in a find, 'gold-bearin' quartz.'"

"I know what this four-flushin' at book minin' 'll run into—that English'll cable me from London wantin' to know if I ain't got the names mixed. I'm like that bank clerk that come into Haileybury as a bartender, an' the first cocktail he slung to-

gether for Smooth Pud Wilson won him a black eye."

"You've took the wrong trail, Red; you're just as far in right as the mahogany-desk engineers. Listen to this:

"Conglomerates and grey whacks of Huronian age occur sparingly on these properties, at times altered to schists, and thus making it difficult and impossible to distinguish them from Keewatin schists.

"See, Red, this feller owns up that it ain't no cinch to address these rocks by their proper names every time."

"That don't help me get the name of this pock-faced cuss!" And Meekins banged a crystallized rock on the table.

"I got it!" Peloo read from the book:

"On the Fish Tail properties a vein has a width at one point of twenty-two feet and consists of ankerite which is cut by numerous strings of quartz-porphyry.

"Our vein is about twenty-two feet wide, so just soak down that piece as quartz-porphyry in ankerite."

"I was guessin' when I started, an' that book has got me talkin' to myself," Meekins growled as he pasted this name on the exhibit.

"Just to prove there ain't no one goin' to call you, listen to this:

"The Huronian in this area has been subjected to intense dynamic metamorphism, and it is difficult to

distinguish Huronian schist or other highly metamorphosed rocks of this age from the Keewatin, so the pre-Cambrian geologist may be excused if he makes a mistake.

"Now what do you think?" Trout queried.

"I ain't thinkin'. You ain't got a headache powder in your stockin', have you, Peloo?" Then he roused and asked angrily: "Have I got to go to school to that cussed book all the time I'm up here?"

A knock caused Trout to hurriedly shove the book in his canvas bag; then he opened the door. "You kind of jumped me; I been havin' a little snooze while Meekins writ his notes," Peloo said as St. John entered.

There was no more work that night, for St. John talked till they turned in.

The next day St. John, wandering about, saw some partridges. Out of curiosity he followed them down off the rock into a cedar-studded muskeg. A few twistings in and out and he was lost; like a flash it came to him that the direction in which the rock island lay was unknown.

His walk grew faster as he travelled and came to nothing familiar; it had increased to a run when a root caught his toe and he landed on the head in the black ooze.

Above him a rasping voice jeered: "Aw-w-w! He-he!"

Wiping the mud from his eyes, St. John saw a blue-grey bird, with head cocked to one side, wink

a black, beady eye. "You're right, my friend; I'm a bally ass to run," he admitted.

He sat down, through his mind flashing memories of stories he had read of men being lost in the great forests. Suddenly the booming note of a voice singing came floating through the whispering leaves. St. John sprang to his feet. The voice sounded in the very opposite direction from that in which his friends should be. However, he hurried toward the music, and in five minutes came to a rock that rose out of the swamp just as did Felix's.

The song had ceased, but as he came to the very edge of the big stone St. John heard a voice saying:

"Johnnie Bull pays me to look after his interests, Felix; that's why I'm goin' to sink a test pit on this vein. It don't mean everything, but it'll show whether this is just a grass-root flash in the pan or a body of ore. It'll be worth more than fifty sheets of writin' in a report."

"Dat'll take 'bout a week, an' he don' ask for no tes' pit."

"He gives me five hundred to do the best I know; that's enough for me."

"M'sieu Red"—Dubois's voice had taken on an oily softness—"if M'sieu St. John buy de mine, I give you five hun'red, too."

There was a minute's silence, then Red's voice, full of repression, answered: "If I had about seven Scotches in me, Felix, there'd be a bad, smashed-up breed lyin' round here in a holy minute. You'd best get out or I might think I had 'em drinks in me."

St. John, possessed of a mixed feeling of delight in Red's honesty, and self-condemnation at playing the eavesdropper, made his way, by a circuit, to the top of the rock.

Meekins started in at his test pit with steel drills, lifting out the rock segments with the brown candles of dynamite. It took four days to sink a shaft of about ten feet, the gold showing richer at the bottom than the top. Each evening Trout and Meekins laboured over their guiding manual and the rock fragments, Meekins always a prey to misgivings.

In the bottom of the test pit a small crevice had appeared in the rock. "I wonder if that opens up?" Peloo said reflectively. He took up a steel drill, inserted its chisel end in the crack, and, squatting down, said: "Hit this a few clouts, Red, same's you was bustin' into a keg of beer."

Meekins swung the heavy sledge, and at the first drive the steel bar broke through so swiftly that it slipped through Peloo's hands, its burred top nailing his thumb and fingers to the hard-faced rock. With a yell Peloo tore his hand loose, and, with fingers under his arm, pranced around in an Indian war dance.

It was too much for Meekins; he laughed.

"Yap, you dang red-headed fool!" yelled Peloo. "One'd think you was tryin' to boost the hittin' machine with a maul at a country fair, the way you hit that steel."

"I can't get that bar out again," Meekins growled as he felt of the steel.

"It'll stay there till hell freezes over before I'll help you get it out," Peloo asserted.

The result of a few more words was that the bar was left. And this incident later on had a big influence on their lives.

The claim had been very practically examined; it was evident to all that it gave promise as a gold mine.

So they set their faces homeward.

CHAPTER III

On their way out St. John, Peloo, and Meekins were in one canoe, while Felix and the guides were in the other.

On the afternoon of the third day they were gliding swiftly downstream, having passed the height of land, when Peloo, whose canoe was well in the lead, made the mistake, where the stream forked, of taking the west branch. Turning a bend whose banks, covered with heavy spruce, hid the view down the river, the canoe suddenly shot ahead like a thoroughbred breaking from the barrier. There was the trembling, vibratory motion of terrific speed, the water racing with the placid velocity of a mill-race.

And the men sitting in that frail craft, looking appealingly at the abrupt-cut banks fifteen feet

high, realized that they had no more control over their flight than if they had been suddenly dropped from Mars. Meekins, who had been sitting, half asleep, in the bow of the canoe, gently slipped a paddle over the racing craft's side, possessed of a fugitive sense of protection against something of disaster.

Peloo's great, bony hands grasped his paddle with a similar grip of defence; the sudden thrusting of him and those who were in his hands into an undreamed-of crisis brought to his forehead the dew of apprehension. "I kind of don't know what's doin', mister," he drawled, holding his voice to a slow measure of placid control, "but keep cool, an' don't get any kind of a move on till I say 'Go!' Me an' Red could 'most shoot Niagara with a good canoe same's this."

St. John must have given a nervous laugh, for Peloo was saying in resentment: "It's a joke on us, right enough, mister, but if there's a jumpin'-off place straight ahead, I wouldn't waste no breath laughin' now."

In fact, Peloo's admonition was rendered abortive by fresh complications; there was neither time to laugh nor inclination to swear. A twist of the stream, still mad racing, and from its waters rose, like the dragon teeth of Jason's perplexity, logs and stumps and tree roots. Sometimes a timely thrust of the paddle by Red's strong arm and they missed, gliding by with arrowlike movement; sometimes from the Peterborough a hoarse moan rose as its

side squeezed through the cushion of water and rasped a trunk.

St. John sat in the stillness with which men wait for unseen death. It could not go on, this escaping; the odds were against it; the fatal loss must come. In the nervous strain he found relief in counting the times they won against destruction; one, two, three—five times they had beaten out the seemingly impossible. No one spoke. Even the waters made little noise. It was like a river running at high speed through the holding banks of a brook; that was all. Six! The huge devil-fish arms of a pine stump, hiding behind a narrow point, had just missed the flying canoe; one long tentacle ripped St. John's side, and from behind came the sharp crash of splintered wood. Then Peloo's voice, intense, collected: "Slip me your paddle, Red; mine's gone."

St. John relayed the blade as Meekins passed it back. Then Red lay like a turtle, his chest to the gunwale, his great, powerful arms stretched one on either side. Another turn. Beyond was the quick glint of an open space, as though a film of green meadow across a screen, and then—the losing chance.

A voice cried out, some one's, in caution. The canoe rose in the air as if the ghost paddlers of the Loup Garou had lifted it; there was the clamouring cry of waters, smashing and tearing, lapping up lives, and the canoe, its prow caught, threw a somersault.

St. John was rolled like a barrel. If he could only get his head out so he could breathe! Something had clutched his coat; he fought against it; it was dragging him resistlessly. Now he was losing his strength, ceasing to battle, smothering. A miracle! His head was clear of the water; the whiskered face of a huge gorilla was peering at him from a mass of brushwood upon which the gorilla's arm was drawing him.

"I just managed to get my dooks into you as she keeled over; I was watchin' you." As Peloo talked he hauled, much as though he were retrieving a floating bag of flour. The network of logs and limbs and stumps was an annex to the river bank, which here was low; it was a jetty along which Peloo salvaged the Englishman.

With his feet finding the assurance of undrunken earth, St. John found opportunity to wring the water from his hair, and voice to thank Peloo.

"I couldn't nohow afford to let you get away before we'd cast up accounts," Trout said deprecatingly. "I was like a feller that got a medal for jumpin' off a dock after a chap that owed him a hundred dollars."

"Where is Meekins?" St. John asked. "I hope he isn't drowned."

"When a man's blocked out to die fightin' booze he ain't goin' to get put out by the baptism route. Red'll fetch up agen a log or somethin' an' crawl out—perhaps with a fat trout in each hand. Just as I was sayin', there he comes now.

"If I'd had a paddle I could've spun by that dashed root," Meekins said, feeling some apology due for the mishap. "When I first climbed out of that fool creek I thought my arm had got twisted off, but I guess it ain't."

Peloo announced solemnly: "Now we're all here, and next meal'll be served in North Bay.

"We ain't got a bite to eat," Red affirmed dolefully; "an' our closest neighbours is 'bout where I live when I'm to home. Gad, I'm hungry now! Let's hike down this fool stream an' see if there's anythin' left of the canoe."

A hundred yards lower down they came to an overhanging shelf where the water took a mad leap of twenty feet, churning itself into yeast against worn fragments of the rock in a caldron below.

St. John gave an involuntary shudder. "Most fortunate we parted company with the canoe before this drop," he exclaimed fervently.

"Maybe. There might be worse ahead," Peloo confirmed.

Cast high on a rampart by a thrust of the waters lay the stern half of their canoe; it had been cut in two. Attached to one of the thwarts, where Peloo had tied them, were the bag of ore samples and St. John's leather bag. A slab of bacon was wedged tight between two bowlders near by.

"Now we'd best keep on an' see where this drunk creek runs to," Peloo said tentatively.

"I don't want to go guessin' where it runs to; I know where it runs from, an' that'll do me," Red

declared. "When Felix finds we've gone wrong he'll back up to where we switched."

Peloo and Meekins argued the matter. Indeed there was much to be said for and against either plan. Following the stream with only one small piece of bacon might lead them far astray and to starvation. Red's plan was the safer. It was coming on toward night, it would be difficult travelling in the dark, so they had better build a big fire, dry out, have some hot bacon, a sleep, and go back up the stream they had left. Felix was on that somewhere, and would not go on without them. St. John cast the deciding vote for this arrangement.

Both men carried matches rolled up in an oilskin, waterproof bag, so that fire was soon started. Slices of bacon were toasted on forked sticks stuck in the ground. A wonderful replenishment of vital force was produced by the joint agency of the succulent browned pork and the marrow-warming blaze of crackling birch limbs.

After eating came the mad desire for a smoke—mad because neither Peloo nor Meekins had a pipe; the nefarious stream had swiped theirs.

"Once I sold a mine in New York, an' one of the gents give me a box of cigars that cost a quarter apiece. They was big an' black, an' Lord! they was good smokes——"

Peloo's monologue was cut short by a groan from Meekins. His exasperation seemed to rise higher, for he added: "If you hadn't steered us into this

gutter, we'd have smokes an' everythin' else now."

Their condition made them peevish, and a fine wrangle started. In the midst of it it dawned upon St. John that the lack of a habitual smoke was at the bottom of all their ill nature. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I'm deuced stupid." He made a dive into his bag and brought forth a briar pipe and a bag of tobacco, which was soon dried and into the bowl. Marvellous the magnetic touch of the little soother. Soon the filmy, lace clouds of smoke dispelled the acrid atmosphere of intolerance as Peloo and Red alternated in possession.

When the pipe was well going St. John said: "I've a bottle of Scotch in my bag that I carry as medicine. Do you gentlemen ever take a drop?"

They hesitated. Peloo was afraid to speak for fear he would break the spell—would wake to find he had dreamed the words "bottle of Scotch." Meekins was simply struck dumb by the magnitude of their good fortune.

St. John mistaking the motive for the silence, broadened the invitation. "I'm wet, and I know it will do me good. You're both wet, and, by Jove, under those circumstances I don't think a drop would hurt any man!"

St. John had the bottle out, and—well, the two old villains fell from grace. They drank, Peloo rubbing a little of it on his moustache to retain the memory.

"Now if you could only bring a flock of blankets out of that bag, mister, we wouldn't care whether

school kept or not," Peloo commented approvingly.

Under the depressing influence of wet clothes, no blankets, the rough, uneven ground to lie upon, the transition of cheeriness wore off. Peloo and Meekins, inured to roughing it, slept some, but St. John hardly closed an eye.

Of course they were up early and had a primitive breakfast cooked. As they ate, St. John suddenly raised his hand and declared that he heard a bell straight down the stream.

Peloo looked at Meekins and winked. "I guess it was the gong on a street car, mister; they run over there about a hundred miles away," he said.

But St. John was in earnest, declaring that he had heard a bell. To Meekins the whole thing was so absurd that he paid no attention to the argument that followed. The discussion roused Peloo's combativeness. He turned on Meekins, declaring that mature thought convinced him they ought to follow downstream to meet Felix. He pointed to the sun peeping through the trees; this showed them that the stream ran east of south, while the stream they had left had a trend due south. This would bring the two together, he declared, and Felix would be waiting at the forks. "I got a hunch we ought to go downstream," he said.

Meekins turned captiously to St. John. "When a baby's got a hunch it wants a feller's watch, there ain't no way but give him the watch."

"What's a hunch, really?" St. John asked.

"It's a bellyache in your brain," Meekins ex-

plained. Then he slung the bag of rock samples to his shoulder, and stood waiting, his face downstream.

"Where you goin'?" Peloo asked.

"There's a nice, comfortable hotel down here, an' Felix's in the bar waitin' for us," Meekins sneered. Then he started.

"You darned old grouch!" Peloo snarled, following, the bacon under his arm. St. John carried the leather bag.

For a hundred yards they struggled through thick brush. From this they suddenly thrust out upon the crest of a granite ridge, devoid of trees, its bald crown smooth from glacier shave. Below was a wide, green valley that held in its lap a beautiful lake, blue as turquoise. Peloo took one look, then he sat down and asked in a bewildered manner: "Say, do you fellers see a city there, or have I got 'em?"

The others admitted that they saw a big building with white-chinked crevices between its logs that looked like a church. Certainly it was, for there was a cross above its roof. There were a dozen other smaller buildings, some of them gleaming white in the sunlight, and on the little lake rested a launch.

"Holy mackerel! An' we lay there in a water trough all night!" Peloo groaned.

St. John laughed. "I'll hardly tell this story when I get back home," he said.

"Mister!" Peloo's voice was dramatic. "You

asked what was a hunch. That's one!" and he pointed his long arm toward the buildings.

Then they went on to the Mission, for such it proved to be. They were warmly welcomed by a delightful, red-cheeked priest, Father Perdue. The little priest would make them whole again, give them a log shack to themselves, feed them, and when they were ready to go give them a canoe and everything required. In fact, he kept a store similar to a Hudson's Bay post in which they could buy anything from a gun to a shoe-lace.

Of course Felix would know they had drifted into the Devil's Chute, as it was called, and would come around that way to gather up their bones, and the little priest laughed.

And later on Dubois turned up.

During the day Peloo untied the bag of samples, saying to Meekins: "We've lost that danged book. Let's see if we kind of got the hang of the names on these pebbles." He emptied the contents on the table; then he gave a yell of dismay.

"What's hurtin' you?" Red queried from the door, where he was filling his pipe.

"Every dang label's washed off!"

Meekins crossed over to the table and looked disconsolately at the rocks. "This all comes of your crazy schemes—the chickens is come home to roost! There ain't nothin' in goin' crooked."

Peloo gathered up the fluttering labels, consigning them and the samples back to the bag. "Don't be a quitter!" he growled. "When we get out I'll

get another book, an' we just go over it again." He set the bag against the wall, saying as he turned around: "If we hadn't lost that book——"

St. John, stepping briskly in the door, heard Peloo's lament. "By Jove, that's so!" He darted out, and, while the two men still held their breath, flipped briskly back again, the missing manual in his hand. "Fancy this is the book you were speaking of—found it in my bag when I was putting the things out to dry; got put in by mistake up at the mine, I fancy."

Peloo took the book, and with eyes full of apprehension gazed solemnly at Meekins. How much of the choice marginal notes had the Englishman read?

But St. John gave no sign; he just crept a little deeper into his English shell.

CHAPTER IV

That evening they had dinner with Father Perdue, and Meekins, lighting his pipe at the big fireplace, saw a piece of quartz on the mantel. He carried it to the lamp to read its caste.

The priest turned to St. John. "M'sieu is looking at the father of sin—gold," he said.

"Even the Church is in the mining game," St. John laughed.

"Not yet, m'sieu," and Father Perdue's eyes twinkled. "But there is gold where that came from to make us all rich and benefit the Church, too."

"We'll form a syndicate," St. John declared, "and give you a quarter."

"Not me, m'sieu. But the Church needs money for build big schoolhouse; for clothes for my poor Indian children; for books."

"Where's dat gol', *mon père?*" Felix questioned.

"Ha-ha!" That priest's round face threw off waves of merriment. "A bird in the hand is what you call no good if he get away to the bush."

"But you could direct us straight to it?" St. John queried.

"Certainement."

"What do you say, Dubois?" St. John asked. "If you'll join us, and hold your matter over till we get out, I'll finance this trip, and we'll have two mines instead of one, eh?"

"I'll go me if don' take too long tam."

A little discussion and a rough agreement was written out and signed; it gave the Mission one-quarter interest, the others dividing the three-quarters.

"Now the cat will come out of the bag," Father Perdue said. Unlocking a wooden *cassette,* he took from it a paper and a canvas bag from which he poured on the table a dozen nuggets of gold.

"There, my friends, is the cause of bloodshed." The priest's voice thrilled with dramatic tenseness; the listeners started. "Let me tell the story," Father Perdue added, spreading a small map on the table. "Here is Moose River"—he placed his finger on

the map—"and there is buried the poor man that found this gold."

"Why is he buried, *M'sieu le Curé?*" Felix asked, and Peloo could feel the breed's hot breath on his neck as he leaned forward, his black bead eyes fastened on the priest's finger.

"For very good reason, son; he is dead, and Grasshead have buried the body."

"Ah, *père,* I understan'," Dubois said in a debonair tone; "dis man have die on de trail."

"He was murdered, Felix, Father Perdue answered sadly.

"How do you know, *mon père?* Have you seen him? You know his name?"

"That I do not know," the priest answered. "Perhaps a wife or a mother waits, and he will come no more."

"Dat's strange, *père,*" Felix protested. "You don't know de man, but you know he was keel—by companion, you say."

Peloo shook the breed's arm from his shoulder; it had tingled him as though charged with electricity.

The priest turned to St. John: "My children, Grasshead and some other Indians are coming over this trail. At Moose River their dogs are making great fuss—hair up, bark all night. They are afraid; they think it is evil spirit, for Indian is most superstitious creature. But in the morning Grasshead follow the dog—of course he follow *le bon Dieu,* who lead him to the dead body, but

he says it is the dog. They find this poor man with big hole in his forehead. They bury him and cut the cross in the bark of a tree; that is his headstone."

"Pardon, Father Perdue," St. John interrupted. "Did Grasshead describe the dead man? I'm—that is—I'd like to know."

"The Indian says it is white man; that is all they tell."

"He shoot himself, *mon père!*" Felix's voice was intense.

"No; it is big hole like the big rifle make, and he has the little gun."

"Grasshead find the gun," Felix sneered.

"No, the murderer he have stole the gun; that also why it is not accident. But they find with these nuggets these small bullets." And Father Perdue placed on the table two .33 shells.

"De man steal de gun, an' he don' take de shells an' de nuggets! Dat's fine story Grasshead tell!" Felix scoffed.

"You see," Father Perdue proceeded quietly, "Indian is like this: When there is something wrong he look all about on the back trail for the story, and Grasshead find a coat, and in the pockets are the shells and the gold, and in the lining is this map."

Peloo, irritated over the excited condition of Dubois, said: "If Felix is quite done with the cross-examination, let's get down to bus'ness an' look at the map."

"Very good," Father Perdue said. First we go in cance from here by Egg Lake and Squaw River and Long Lake to this place, Little Moon River." He placed the point of his chubby finger on the beginning of the trail marked on the map. "That will take five days. I will send Grasshead, who will show you most excellent—he knows some of the trail. Then you go to Loon Lake and Moose River, where is the cross on the tree, and from there is old blazed trail to Bitter Water Lake. That is this." The priest's finger had followed the inked line on the map. "From this, you see, is the little stream of bitter water that ends at this egg-shaped place that is marked, as you see, 'Gold Rock.' "

From beneath the map Father Perdue slipped a sheet of ordinary paper. "This," he explained, "was also in that coat."

It showed Bitter Lake, the stream, the oval gold rock, and, in addition, a square opening where the stream ran from the oval.

"That's meant for a cave," Peloo said. "I guess the feller that drew the first map didn't know about it."

"An' that's where 'em nuggets come from," Meekins added. "They look like placer stuff."

"It looks very reasonable to me," St. John declared. "We'll start to-morrow, eh, Dubois?"

The breed drew back from the table; his face showed sickly yellow in the lamplight. *"Non!* I'm not goin' mak' dat fool trip," he declared solemnly.

"What!" St. John gasped, and Father Perdue added softly: "That is not very honorable, m'sieu."

"Dat's all muskeg country up dere; dere's no gol'."

"Have you been there to see, Felix?" Peloo asked, his eyes fixed on the snake eyes of the breed. "From what I can make out, an' rememberin' the lay of the country where your mine is, I allow they're in the same general direction.

"I ain't been dere," Felix snarled; "but I'm sick for all tam chasin' ghost mine. If I heard dis story firs', I don' promise go. An Injun bring de gol', an' got fairy story 'bout some man is keel. Plenty tam I go out wit' fell' who know where gol' mine is, so plenty as never was. I get all eat up wit' flies in summer, an' freeze to deat' in winter, an' de story 'bout de mines is lies. I got one good gol' mine; dat's 'nough for me. An', by gar, if dat fell' has record dat claim, how you goin' get heem?"

Meekins swung in his chair so his eyes were full on the breed's face. "Do you think, Felix, the murderer'd take a chance on the hangman like that? He'll wait a year before he records that claim—wait till the murder's all blowed over."

"Gentlemen," St. John interposed, "I think Dubois and I will go over to my quarters and talk this matter over. And, Father Perdue, even if Dubois backs out, we'll carry the thing through."

The priest folded the map. "Put this in your pocket, then, m'sieu," he said.

Dubois and St. John left the room.

When they entered the shack St. John took off his coat. This action seemed to have a fascinating interest for Dubois. His eyes twitched nervously when St. John hung it on a nail in the wall near the head of his bed; he scanned the approach to it from the door.

On the bunk that was for Peloo and Meekins there were no pillows, but a quick glance at St. John's showed that the little priest had provided this luxury for the city man.

Seating himself on the bed, St. John asked: "You won't go with us, Felix?"

"No; dat fool trip!"

"Well, then you'll have to extend the option I hold on your property for another sixty days."

"You buy de mine now, M'sieu St. John," Felix said in a coaxing voice. "You see, he is a good wan —plenty gol'. I wan' go back to my little farm in Quebec; I'm tired, me, of de bush."

"I can't buy a mine without a report by an engineer on it; it's never done. I'm not sure that Mr. Meekins's report is going to be satisfactory." St. John was thinking of the mysterious annotations in the mining manual.

It was just at this period that Trout and Meekins came within earshot. Peloo threw his long arm across Red's chest, and drew him out of the shaft of light that shot through the open door, whispering: "Here's where we get a line on the gent from London; it's like a peep at the other feller's hand in a game of poker."

"Is M'sieu Red knock de mine?"

Peloo slipped his fingers beneath Red's coat collar.

"Meekins is practical"—Peloo nudged Red in the ribs—"and honest, and when I get to Toronto I'll have a technical man go over his samples and notes with him." ("That lets me out," whispered Red.) "Therefore the sixty days."

The breed laughed: "You get back in 'bout t'ree mont'; p'r'aps never."

"Get shot, like that poor chap?"

"Dat's jus' Injun lies!" Felix retorted. "Dat man is tenderfoot, gets los', an' starve to deat'. You buy de mine now."

"No, I won't."

There was something so unalterably decisive in the Englishman's voice that the evil mixture of French and Indian in Dubois's veins ignited. He sprang to his feet, beat his chest with clenched fist, and spat out in anger: "By gar, I see de game! Red Meekins—*nom du chien!*—is knock de mine so you get heem cheap. You get option so.I canno' sell heem, an' Red'll tell ever-body de mine is no good."

Dubois's tones were drowned by turmoil at the door. Large animals bellowed in rage; two, in close alliance, pitched through the door, wound in each other's arms. The large animal on top wore the gargoyle face of Peloo. Dubois's infantile rage died; he pushed his stool to a corner and sat down.

St. John's "Gentlemen!" seemed irrelevant.

Peloo, rising, retained a grasp on Meekins's shirt. "Red kind of slipped on the step; he ain't used to hard-wood floors," he explained.

"I'm seek, me—I got bad pain," said Felix, stepping into the light.

"A little whisky will put that right." St. John took out his bottle, and was thrusting it into Felix's eager hands when Peloo, trembling with apprehension, grasped it, saying: "There's a cup on the table, Felix; bring it an' I'll give you a stiff horn."

Peloo, drawing the flowing stream as fine as a straw, at the first hesitating *"Merci"* from Felix, cut off supply. He corked the flask and thrust it back on St. John. "We'd best nurse that for accidents."

Meekins groaned as the flask disappeared.

"I was trying to arrange with Dubois over the mine," St. John said casually.

Felix, deceived by the demeanor of Peloo and Red into a belief that they had not overheard him, sat down.

"That ought to be as easy as rollin' off a log," Peloo declared cheerily. "You've come grubbin' round for a gold farm, and Felix has stubbed his toe agin' the real cheese. Ain't it a good mine, Red?"

"It's the makin' of a good mine, I think," the latter answered diplomatically. "Of course it's only a prospect yet."

"She ain't pay no div'dends yet," Felix sneered.

"Dat's right, M'sieu Red, you knock de mine; dat mak' you good engineer, eh?"

"Look here, *breed!* If you pan any more of that dirt, I'll mop the floor with your body."

But St. John interposed: "Mr. Meekins speaks well of your claim, Dubois. If he had knocked it, I wouldn't want an option. It's getting late, my dear fellow, and I'll tell you in very few words what I'll do. I'll be fair. I don't want you to wait for nothing; I'll pay you one thousand dollars for the extra sixty-day option. If I don't take the mine, the money is yours; what?" And he waited, watching the breed's frowning face.

"How I know de bank cash de check?" Dubois asked suspiciously.

From his pocket St. John drew a roll of bills. "You see, I come prepared," he said, laughing. "I don't expect a man in the woods to take my word for anything." He held the money like a bait. "If you sign an option, here is one thousand dollars, and I won't buy the mine now."

"Ver' well, m'sieu. Write de paper. I'm in hole; I got to take it."

When Felix had signed the option and gone down to sleep by the canoe Peloo said: "Maybe Mr. Meekins won't just write as good a report, losin' most of his field notes in that dang creek."

"By jove, I must be pretty well satisfied with Meekins's work when I pay two hundred quid to still hang on; what?"

Red held out his hand. "Shake, mister; that

mine's a good one; the report ain't going to cut no ice, an you know it. I like a man when I meet him." Red's cheeks were hot; he turned flounderingly to Trout: "Ain't that right, Peloo?"

"Sure thing, Red," Trout answered.

CHAPTER V

To Red and Peloo retiring was a simple observance. The coat was removed and folded for a pillow, boots were taken off, the trouser waistband loosened, and the ceremony was over.

As Peloo rolled his ungainly figure to the back of the bunk to make room for Meekins, he was chuckling. Red, still moody over Dubois, said querulously: "Cry yourself to sleep pretty quick."

"Say, Red," whispered Peloo, "why does English want to take his pants off just 'cause he's goin' to bed? I wouldn't give 'em skeeters such a chance at my legs."

Red eyed the eccentric one. His gyrations—the putting of things beneath his pillow, the arranging of his boots against the wall, the indissoluble touches of city life, varied by numerous swipes at thighs and calves, amused Meekins. Then his eyes falling on St. John's bag, he turned on his back with a groan: "Say, Peloo, why didn't you think first about havin' that pain in the belly? Why'd you let Felix beat you to the whisky?"

In an agony of remorse Peloo flopped over with his face to the wall; only presently to find a thumb

and finger twined affectionately in his whiskers with a tug that indicated Red wanted him to roll over. When he had complied, Meekins whispered: "He's writin' home."

True enough, St. John was very busy indeed with pencil and paper beside the lamp.

"If you see him do anything else, keep it to yourself," Peloo rasped as he turned back to the wall.

But St. John was making a copy of the map. When he had finished he put the copy in his bag, returned the original to the pocket of his coat, hung the coat at the head of his bed, put out the light, and turned in.

Meekins lay running the gamut of the day past. It was Peloo who had led him into this four-flushing game, but he blamed himself for it. He cursed Felix for a bad breed; then he dropped off, thinking of the whisky in St. John's bag. Something woke him. Instinctively his eyes went to the open door; he could have sworn a shadow had crossed the moonlight that streamed in. "Huskie dogs," he muttered drowsily; then he slept again.

Present a head thrust above the doorstep, and for five minutes its owner listened to the deep breathing of the sleepers. Then a man crept through the door and across the floor on all fours to the head of St. John's bed. There he rose to his feet, and, putting a hand in the Englishman's coat pocket, drew forth the map. As he turned to go, his foot touched the black bag that contained

the essence of temptation to an Indian. He stooped and slipped the catch.

There was seemingly no sound, but Red's eyes flashed open, his mind as alert as though he had been called. But there was nothing save the moonlight streaming into a silent room. Meekins spat to relieve the tension. There was a slipping noise at the head of St. John's bed; in the shadow of the wall something moved. With no impediment of bedclothes Red's spring was clean and swift; his grapple strong and sure.

With a cry St. John sat up and struck a match to the lamp. Peloo stood on the floor, a boot in his hand as a weapon. "Danged if it ain't Felix!" he exclaimed as Meekins rose from atop the prostrate breed.

"Extraordinary caper!" St. John growled as he slipped into his pants. "What are you doing here, Dubois?"

Dubois spat a red froth from his lips that lay bruised against his teeth, and answered: "I been sick, me; I got pain in my belly. *Mon Dieu,* he cut like t'ousan' knife! I come here for ask M'sieu St. John for leetle whisky, an' Red he grab me on my back. By gar, dat not fair!"

"Why didn't you call when you come to the door?" Red asked suspiciously.

"I don't want wake ever'body, jus' m'sieu; dat's why I don' speak."

"You were asking for a little whisky." St. John bent over his bag to open it, only to straighten up

at once. "By Jove, I'm awfully sorry, but I really haven't any left to give!"

"Well, can't help dat, I s'pose," Felix said resignedly. "I go try get sleep."

"What made English change his mind 'bout givin' Felix a drink?" Red asked, as they once more straightened away for sleep.

"The bag was open when he went to get the bottle."

"Why didn't he round on Felix; he must've been tryin' to steal it, eh? English's a pretty good sport."

"Yes, he's a good sport. He didn't know just at once whether one of us might've slipped over there an' hooked a snifter, so he didn't want to say anythin' about it."

"That's what Felix came back for, eh, to steal the whisky?" Red said sleepily.

"Yes; Injun blood'll pour itself into hell any time on the chance of mixin' with liquor."

It was early morning when Peloo woke Meekins. "If you'll cook breakfast, Red, I'll slip down an' ask Mr. Felix to peel one of 'em hundred-dollar bills off his roll in the way of commission."

When Peloo returned he looked dolefully at Meekins and croaked: "Felix's flitted!"

"What!" Red almost dropped the fry pan.

"Yes. Where his canoe floated there's a dent in the pond. And he's left Big Little Joe an' the other nichie—I just see 'em tearin' along on the hunt for him."

Meekins called St. John, and they sat around the camp fire to eat breakfast and discuss the new vagary of Dubois.

Presently St. John put his hand in his pocket, and, missing the map, stood up and searched every pocket. "By Jove!" he said. "I've lost that map; I put it in this pocket last night."

"Felix rustled it; that's what he was up to," Peloo declared.

"What'd he take the map for if he was skinnin' out for home?" Meekins queried.

"A breed is like a wolverine—he's so used to stealin' when he's hungry that when he gets fat he keeps it up just for fun. He come to guzzle that whisky, an' rustled the map just out of deviltry. He didn't want to go himself, so he didn't want us to go."

"You ain't got Felix hefted right this time, Peloo," Meekins objected. He's got a big start. Bein' half Injun, he can travel on a lean belly, an' he's gone on to stake that claim. He'll slip out an' sell it on the samples he gets, an' we'll never see that breed again. He'll go down into Quebec and live on what he gets out of those two mines."

"Anyway, we ain't got the map now, an' can't find the mine. We got to just put our heads under our arms an' go home," Peloo added.

St. John jumped up, hurried into the shack, and returned, waving his copy of the map. "You see, we always keep papers of value in duplicate in England," he explained.

"I guess you saved the bacon, mister," and Peloo looked at Meekins, amazement in his eyes.

Father Perdue raised his hands in pious horror when told of Dubois' perfidy. "I will give you the *Wawa;* she is good yacht, and you can go with her beyond Long Lake, 'bout three day, before you got to get into canoe. You will pass the dishones' Felix. Also I will send Grasshead."

No time was to be lost. Supplies—even to a new rifle from the Mission store, and dynamite and steel—were gathered on the run. They were soon under way, towing canoes to be used when they abandoned the *Wawa* in shallow water.

Peloo was captain and engineer of the little craft that sped so jauntily over the water, the sun mirroring its white shell in broken blotches on the turquoise blue of the lake.

Through Squaw River and Egg Lake, and then out onto the lengthy oval of Long Lake, they sped. Meekins sat forward beside Grasshead, and the two watched almost silently for signs. In the northland night comes late in the summer. The full glory of gold was glooming in the west when Grasshead pointed a hand at many spots of flickering black in the sky ahead of them. "Him!" he ejaculated. Red understood. The wild fowl, ducks, and loons were flying erratically with swift haste; they had been disturbed after settling down for the night.

They were approaching the narrowed part of the

lake; a passage led onward as far as they could see.

"Pull her to the right bank, Peloo!" Red commanded. When the launch touched, Red and Grasshead sprang out, and like hounds searched the ground. "Felix is ahead—not far," Red advised when he came back. "We'll camp here."

After supper Red put into words the thing that was bothering him. "Dang if I can make out why that breed isn't further ahead, an' just now he's tryin' to make time, too. He's takin' his canoe through there on the trackin' line an' racin' like a bull moose. He must've waited back there till he was sure we was goin' to start."

"If he wanted to get the mine, an' had a map, what'd he do that for?" Peloo asked.

"He's got me guessin'; some hell'ry on we ain't doped out yet."

CHAPTER VI

They were away early in the morning, the swift current through the channel causing them to make slow progress. It was three hours before they emerged into the lake again. Then they ate up the miles, the throbbing, beating little cylinder usurping all the toil for that day.

"Felix ain' got a chance," Peloo was saying, as he headed the *Wawa* for a cheery little bit of sand beach that nestled beneath the spruce and pines.

"We'll camp here, an' our run to-morrow will be ha-ha to the *Wawa*."

He swung the boat sharp across to the right, and the next instant, with a rasping groan, the little *Wawa* shoved her nose up in the air and stopped.

"By Jove!" St. John cried. "What's happened?"

"Struck a rock," Peloo answered. "I'll soon get her off." He reversed the engine; the blades churned with avidity, but the *Wawa* settled down in her nest.

Meekins, as boatswain, took soundings. With a pole he prodded the water starboard and port. "This seems to be the big toe of the foot," and he pointed to a shelving, turtle-backed granite point just beyond.

"Shove her off!" Peloo commanded.

Meekins and Grasshead put their weight to the pole, but the *Wawa* might have been asleep for all the movement this created. "She seems to've run her belly right up on the rock," Red declared. "What we'd best do is slip over the side an' boost her." Even as he spoke Meekins was shedding his clothes. "Might's well keep my pants dry as sleep in 'em wet on the sand."

"You an' Grasshead drop overboard an' shoulder her off while I push with the pole," Peloo advised.

Meekins and Grasshead slipped to the sunken rock, the water being waist-deep. Grasshead put his shoulder to the port side, Meekins to the starboard.

Peloo adjusted the cedar pole between the two

men. "When I give the word you fellers push with all our might. Make ready!" he trumpeted. "Yo heave!"

If the *Wawa* had stood on greased ways and somebody had knocked the holding key block out, she could not have departed with more celerity.

Peloo, his legs yanked from beneath, with a wild yell pitched parabolically, in his descent carrying Meekins with him. Grasshead, startled, stood helpless. The reversed screw carried the *Wawa* out into the lake, the pop-pop of the exhaust sounding like the echo of a mocking laugh.

From the stern of the launch St. John was yelling: "I say, what do I do to stop this devilish thing from running away?"

"Turn over the engine," Peloo bellowed in answer.

The Englishman knew nothing of mechanics. He looked helplessly at the chugging engine. At the first attempt to interfere he nearly lost the fingers of a hand. Then he tried the steering wheel, and the *Wawa* spun around, crashing into the canoe. He whirled the wheel back, and the excited boat snapped the line holding the Peterboroughs, and they drifted languidly away. St. John sat down; he saw the three marooned men line upon the sands, Peloo's grotesque shape, combined with the bare shanks of the others, suggesting Crusoe and twin Fridays.

Peloo was growling: "We ain't got no grub,

Red, an' if English monkeys with that engine he'll sink the boat."

"I got to go an' sit in the water—danged if I can stand the black flies! An' to-night me an' Grasshead'll have to sleep in the lake 'cause of the skeeters," Red lamented.

Peloo's matches were dry in their oilskin wrapper, and he soon had a fire going. As the thick smoke ascended Red came out of the water and stood in the protection of its cloud.

"Heap big fool, him!" And Grasshead swung his arm in a wave of disgust toward the Englishman in his erratic castle.

"Well, you don't talk none too much as a rule, nichie, so we'll forgive you this time. Person'lly there may be something in what you say," Peloo commented.

Out on the lake, St. John was thinking. If he could but start the propeller ahead, he might get the *Wawa* to shore. Night was coming on. He grasped the starting lever and threw it over with such force that he all but wrecked the clutch. To his delight the shocked *Wawa* sprang forward with a startled gasp, by chance heading straight for a big rock.

Peloo ran down the strip of sand, yelling: "Stop her! Throw over the lever!"

St. John grabbed the lever and yanked it back. This time there was no doubt about what happened to the clutch. The cogs in the reverse gear were snipped off like peas flipping from a bursting pod.

Though the engine churned away merrily, the screw ceased to revolve. Of its momentum the launch continued, but something had given it a tangented swing. It just shaved the rock, and once more headed out into the lake, where it stopped.

Naturally St. John threw the lever forward, nicely clipping the remaining cogs. The engine sped on, though the screw sulked. This puzzled him. His eyes wandered over the network of pipes, levers, and wires till it fell upon an iron standard, topped by a half disk which carried an index finger. He had seen Peloo shift this finger when the boat was not running satisfactorily. It was the spark, and the last thing St. John should have touched. He didn't shift it far—two or three inches—but to advance the spark the full limit was like shoving a man off a cliff. The prematurely exploded compressed gas hit an honest-toiling piston on top of the head with a jolt that left it dead in the lap of the cylinder. At the gunlike roar of the back fire St. John sprang back so nimbly that he landed flat on his back. "Fancy I've made a bally mess of you, my incomprehensible friend," he apologized to the now silent engine.

The echo of the explosion reached the shore. "I guess that'll be 'bout all from 'em engines to-day," said Peloo. "We'll wait to see if she sinks, an' then turn in for the night. You best throw a heap of sand up over your legs, Red."

It was some night, as Meekins confided to the horizon in the morning. Peloo, blest with trousers,

slept like a just man. Meekins hung his bare legs over a log in the smoke of the fire, but sometimes sparks nestled in the thick underbrush of red hair, and sometimes when the smoke shifted with the wind a horde of hungry mosquitoes sought his blood. At intervals St. John called to assure them that he was still in port.

At daybreak Meekins and Grasshead found one of the canoes and towed the *Wawa* to shore. "This is another of 'em stories there ain't none of us goin' to tell back home," said Peloo as St. John warmed his back at the fire.

Then followed three days of canoe drudgery; paddling in good water, Peloo and Red's powerful strokes sending the Peterborough along. On the stream Red and Grasshead swung to the leather collar of the tracking line, plunging through mud and water like spaniels mile after mile.

And all the time Red was searching for signs of Felix. Once bubbles floated on the lazy surface of a reach of still water, and Red, calling back "Marsh!" to Grasshead, surged into the collar. They were rounding a bend, and his sudden tightening of the line lifted the Indian off the narrow bank and dropped him in ten feet of water. They had to salvage Grasshead, and by the time they reached the point there was no sign of Felix. Once they were so close that the Indian's nose picked from the breeze a scent of tobacco.

On the third evening they made camp at Little Moon River. From there the trail led across coun-

try to Bitter Water Lake, as shown on the map. There was practically no trail; it would be difficult to keep in the right way, even with Grasshead's guidance.

They hid their canoe in some willows, and early in the morning took up the gold trail. St. John insisted on carrying a pack, so was given some blankets with the dynamite inside. Grasshead said that they had better eat at eleven o'clock, and they could make the next meal at Pipestone Falls, where was good water. In fact, the trail swung to the north to tap the water there.

As they approached Pipestone, Grasshead, in the lead, held up his hand for the others to stop; then he slipped his pack and stole through the bush. Presently he returned to explain that he had seen a Peterborough canoe on the edge of the big pool below the falls, and, this being an unusual craft among Indians, had feared it might be some evil medicine of Felix's. "Injun got him!" he said. The Indian was a Cree, his name Squabo. He was catching fish in the pool and drying them in the sun for winter use. He was alone save for a huge, gaunt dog that well bore the name of One Wolf.

Like the Peterborough, the dog was an unusual exhibit for an Indian to possess. His large, big-boned frame, black-haired save for the white face, suggested a civilized breed; the standing ears, the wide, curved forehead, and the curious guttural howl that was his effort to bark, denoted a mixture

of huskie and wolf. He was, as St. John said, a most villainous-looking dog.

"He ain't got nothin' on his boss in bad looks," Peloo had added.

Grasshead and Squabo smoked the speech-loosening pipe together after the Cree had gorged upon the white man's food.

"Bad Injun?" Peloo queried when Grasshead rejoined the group.

The Indian thrust his right hand, with the palm flattened, beneath his left; then he darted the two first fingers of a hand forward like the thrust of a fork, and grunted: *"Camouse.* Him name Muskwa; Squabo lie name."

"Grasshead says," Red interpreted, "that Squabo is underhanded, has the tongue of a snake—a liar —and is a thief. *'Camouse'* means squaw stealer."

"Delectable character," St. John commented.

"He stole that canoe; sure; he wouldn't get money enough in a thousand years to buy one, and if he did get it he'd buy fire water," Red declared.

But in spite of his moral obliquity, Grasshead advised that they hire Squabo to show them the trail to Bitter Lake. It would save time, as the Cree would take them straight across country to it.

At first Squabo refused to go; he wanted to fish. Even the ten dollars that St. John agreed to give failed as a bait. It was only when Peloo began to ask how he had come by a Peterborough that Squabo, frightened, began to weaken. He agreed to go, demanding the money in advance.

They had travelled half a mile when the fiendish, howling bark of One Wolf came hurtling through the air from the late camp, where he had remained to clean up the scraps. Soon the gaunt dog moved swiftly into view. He did not check his travel till he reached Squabo; then he turned, and, hair erect, bared his fangs and hurled a guttural curse back over the trail.

Peloo looked at Meekins and asked: "What d'you make of that?"

"Felix," Meekins answered laconically.

"What's he hangin' on our trail for? Why don't he push on an' stake?"

"Why is a breed?" Meekins snarled. "I never could guess one of 'em. Anyway, that pup'll be a good watchman. Let's move on."

That evening they came to Loon Lake. As Meekins shifted his shoulders from the straps of his pack he said: "Here's where that poor feller camped, accordin' to the map; hope his ghost don't bother none."

Gradually, as they had traversed the trail, words of the dead man had crept into their speech. The tragedy of his hunt for the gold they were after cast its spell over their spirits.

"After I've had a smoke I'll build a shack," Peloo commented, sitting down to fill his pipe. Grasshead was building a fire to cook the evening meal.

"What's Meekins looking for?" St. John asked,

nodding toward the latter, who was prowling restlessly about the old camping place.

"He's just lookin' for things. I ain't never struck an old camp yet that somebody ain't left somethin' behind—gener'lly a knife."

"Devilish odd idea; what?"

Peloo sucked at his pipe, then said solemnly: "If I'd saved all the truck I'd found in camps, I'd have enough to outfit a museum. Once I found a glass eye—that was at Athabasca Landin'; it must've rolled off into the grass in the night when its owner had a nightmare or somethin'."

"Perhaps Meekins will find a set of false teeth there," St. John said insinuatingly, as Peloo stirred up his pipe.

"Red's a great reader," Trout declared, ignoring this.

"Books on geology chiefly, I suppose," St. John commented.

Peloo looked at the speaker through a cloud of smoke. "In a profess'onal way generally; but he's mostly stuck on detective stories. I guess he's now tryin' to read the story of that feller an' his killer." Peloo puffed his pipe, then he continued: "In a city Red wouldn't dare take a walk without a guide. He couldn't ketch nothin' there 'cept a stiff dose of booze, but here in the bush the trees'll tell him stories; they open up their hearts an' talk to him. You've seen a dog runnin' all over the place, chasin' up his master's trail? Well, it's pretty near like that with Red. In the bush or in the mine he seems

to know what's beyond where your eyes an' mine'd stop. But I guess I'd better get a house built for the night."

He cut a pole ten feet long, and adjusted it between the forked limbs of two trees; then he put three poles like rafters against this and threw a tarpaulin over the poles, making a comfortable lean-to.

St. John was frightfully tired. The pack had stiffened his neck, and there was sand or ground glass beneath his shoulder blades. The pork frying in the pan ravished his senses; he ate of it ravenously.

When they had changed from supper to the smokes, St. John asked: "Did you discover anything, Meekins?"

"Well, I figger that dead man found the killer here. I guess he come from Little Moon with an Injun an' hooked up with the Killer, who'd been here 'bout a month. Yon's where he bunked," and Meekins pointed to a flat bundle of red spruce boughs. "He was an old-timer, Injun or breed, 'cause he wove 'em spruce fingers like a wire mattress. They was cut 'bout last May."

"You mean the Killer?" Peloo queried.

Meekins nodded. "He had a canoe; I see the marks in the clay bank there in the lake. They sent the Injun back in 'bout two days, then they built a cache; there it is," and Red pointed to a platform about ten feet high. "On that they cached

some of the feller's grub for when they was comin' out again."

"How do you know they sent the Indian back in two days? Pardon me, but it's devilish interesting."

"I'll show you, mister," Meekins said patiently, and he carried St. John to where much chopping had been done. "The Injun that come had a narrow-bladed Hudson's Bay ax with a couple of nicks in it; I see his marks as we come over the trail. Look; there's some of his choppin'; it's like a beaver chawed the sticks off, an' there's 'bout enough of that kind of choppin' to make fire for two days. An' there ain't none of it showin' on 'em poles in the cache; they built that after he'd gone, 'cause if he'd been here the other feller'd do no choppin'.

"Now look at this"—Red patted the tapered end of a birch log a foot in diameter—"there ain't a nick, there ain't a false stroke; that's what I call choppin'. I don't know but one man in these parts that can swing an ax like that. Did you ever see choppin' like that before, Peloo?" There was a suggestion of something in Red's tone.

"I kind of think I did once," Trout answered.

"That was done with an American ax—it's got a wide blade," Meekins continued; "an' the same feller had been swingin' that ax here for 'bout a month off an' on."

"Perhaps the Killer built the cache before they come," Peloo suggested.

"He didn't need no cache, 'cause he was livin'

on rabbits an' muskrats. I see the fur all about. An' it was built after the Injun had done his old-woman choppin', 'cause the brush of the tree the poles was cut from is all on top the poplars the Injun cut down."

As they sat down by the fire Meekins took from his pocket a handful of cartridge shells. "The Killer that was camped here had a .45-95 rifle; there's a lot of empty shells about. I guess these .33 shells belonged to the dead man. Likely he had one of 'em high-velocity guns. An' these shells tells pretty near how he got killed; it was a clean case of murder."

"Wonderful, if you can prove it," St. John commented.

"You'll see that two of these shells has got the bullets still in 'em; the other one had, too, before I pulled it. I was kind of curious to know why it hadn't gone off, 'cause a mark showed the hammer had bust the cap."

"Bad cap?" Peloo queried.

"No; there wasn't no powder in the cartridge." With his knife Meekins pried the bullet from another shell; it, too, held no powder.

"What does that mean, exactly?" St. John asked.

"That the Killer meant to murder him, an' when the other feller wasn't lookin' fixed the ammunition."

"But he didn't kill him here," Peloo objected.

"He killed him at Moose River, after they'd left the mine. But the priest said he'd stole the gun,

an' he's emptied the shells out here when he come to his canoe; see?"

"Marvellous!" St. John exclaimed.

"Well, mister, it's only kind of a guess, you see," Red said modestly.

St. John rose, and, turning his back to the fire, said: "I can't get my breeches dry—they're wet with perspiration."

"Excuse me, mister, but that looks like grease, same's if you'd sat in the fry pan," Peloo offered. He passed his hand over the seat of St. John's breeks, then he jumped up and examined the Englishman's pack. "That's dynamite in the seat of your pants!" he declared emphatically. "The heat of the sun an' your body made 'em sticks run."

"I'm afraid you're pulling my leg, Trout." St. John's eyes were full of suspicion.

"Pullin' nothin'! There was only a thin blanket between 'em candles an' your body, an' the heat melted the nitroglycerin away from the burned clay that holds it; that's all. You got all the explosive, though."

Peloo's earnest manner convinced St. John, and he edged gingerly away from the fire, expostulating: "A rum go, I must say! I can't throw away my breeches; what am I to do?"

"You'll just have to lead an orderly life, mister; there ain't nothin' else to it. Don't sit down too suddent, an' if you're goin' to fall, fall on your face. Don't slap the skeeters too hard on your

hips, an' don't strike no matches on your pants."

"Mister, if you listen to that boob you'll be afeared to breathe. I never see a man in my life was so fond of the groan stuff. Dynamite is just one of the sweetest-behaved things; I'll show you." Red took a stick of the explosive from St. John's pack, broke off a piece, and, lighting it, held it as it burned like a candle. St. John was frozen with horror.

"Red likes to show off," Peloo advised St. John. "We wasn't talkin' 'bout you goin' to light your pants, an', as I said, as long as you're smooth an' easy with the stuff it'll behave. But if you was to strike a match on your pants, I'd figger it was just like ticklin' a mule in the heel with your nose."

Peloo's voice was drowned by a bellow from One Wolf. Just beyond the firelight he stood, watching something that moved still farther out in the gloom. The figure of a man appeared. It was Squabo; they had not noticed him going into the woods.

Peloo touched Meekins on the arm. "A dog don't howl at his boss," he said.

The black dog, his bristles ridged along his spine, stood with bared fangs, snarling at something just beyond the arc of light.

"Marsh!" Squabo cried, throwing a stick as he passed. But One Wolf charged a couple of yards, his feet tearing up the dead leaves, and then backed up again.

"What's the matter with your pup?" Peloo asked.

"Don't know; see him bear p'r'aps." And Squabo took his blanket and curled up just beyond the fire.

St. John knocked the ashes from his pipe, and passing to the lean-to, lay down.

By the dancing flames that threw flashes of purple light across the yellow-ochre mask of Squabo's face, Peloo could see that the Indian furtively watched for something in the black void of the silent, mysterious pine forest. Suddenly at his elbow Grasshead whispered, "Him bad Injun!" Peloo was startled. He had not spoken, yet Grasshead read his thoughts. "What was One Wolf afeared of?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't know," Peloo retorted; "but you're lyin' just the same, for you think you do. Was it Felix?"

"Mebbe."

"Was it a ghost—the spirit of him you buried?"

"Mebbe, too."

"Or was it just an or'inary pig-eyed bear lookin' for somethin' to eat?"

"Plenty bear now 'cause huckleberries ripe—mabbe bear."

"Well, Grasshead, you've got the northern lights skinned a thousand ways for variety."

The Indian did not keep pace with Peloo's illusive innuendo. He blinked the eyes that were much like glass agates, with their yellow-red glaze, and took a few puffs at his pipe. Then he said:

"Squabo 'fraid for go near the Devil Mine. Him think you try find dat bad-medicine gol'."

"How does he know we're huntin' gold; we ain't told him?"

"I don't know me; I go sleep." Grasshead took his gray blanket and curled up near Squabo.

"Both of 'em playin' possum," Peloo muttered. "What d'you make of it, Red. What's gettin' us, anyway?"

"I don't know," Meekins answered.

"Now just say three times 'Maybe, maybe, maybe,' same's Grasshead did, then I'll go an' wake English up, an' me an' him'll sit an' talk 'bout London."

"I know what you mean, Peloo, that I'm duckin', but I ain't. I don't know what the devil's comin' to this neck of the woods. D'you think I ain't heard things an' felt 'em? They was close, too."

"How close?" Peloo asked, and his shaggy face was thrust almost into Red's.

"Sometimes I could've throwed an ax an' hit somethin' if I could've seen it. There's somethin' peepin' over my shoulder all the time."

"An' mine, too," Peloo interposed.

"An' Grasshead's," Meekins continued. "English don't find it—much. I guess it's 'cause he's of the city; he don't seem to hear nothin' in the woods. It's kind of like a dif'rent language to him. When 'em partridges was whistlin' there to-day in that little hollow where the black currants grow beside the creek, he walked right in among 'em, and when

they went off *whir-r-r, whir-r-r!* I guess he thought he was shot."

"No, I guess he's more used to hearin' an alarm clock 'bout noon than anythin'. I tried to get him set on to that bull moose as we come up the creek. The bull was gruntin' like a pig, 'Whee-a, whee-a!' but St. John couldn't hear it."

"Therefore," Red said slowly, "he's kind of like a babe pullin' a pup's tail; he can't read no signs an' he ain't worryin' none."

Almost imperceptibly both men gave a twitching start. Something in the gloom of the tamaracks had splashed the water; perhaps a night fowl, a loon, or perhaps a raccoon fingering the ooze for a frog.

Peloo, turning his back to the fire so that the shadow of the forest with its hidden things lay before his eyes, said casually: "Back at Sturgeon Creek I see a man's fresh trail."

"I saw it—Felix's. Don't say nothin' to English 'bout it."

"Yes, if he gets cold feet, he'll want to turn back. I'm goin' to foller this trail if it leads to China. Gold mines ain't found every day, an' I'm 'bout tired of buckin' the bush. I'm gettin' old, Red."

"English won't get no cold feet; 'tain't that. But if he gets askin' questions—I can stand the flies, an' I can stand goin' without grub, but when he gets busy wantin' to know things, that finishes me."

"What's Felix hangin' on our trail for? What's the fool idee, Red?"

"Felix thinks 'cause he stole that map that all we've got to lead us to that gold mine is Grasshead. He'll try to get the Injun away from us so we'll have to turn back. He's afeared that even if he got to the mine first, we'd make a fight for it."

"An' we got to take good care of Grasshead's health; that crook would shove a knife into him if he got the chance. Let's turn in, Red."

As the two men crossed to their blankets, Grasshead rose, saying: "Me no sleep—big heap talk."

Peloo laughed, and, handing a plug of tobacco to the Indian, said: "Well, smoke, you dang old crank!"

Meekins put the stock of his rifle against the folded coat pillow, muttering: "I'll make a sieve of anythin' as wakes me up."

Perhaps the night air, vibrant with mental static, flashed this boast broadcast. He had drawn off but one of his long-legged boots when the forest echoed the blood call of hungry wolves. Like a knife the first three sharp, cutting notes had come; then, caught up and answered from all sides, the din was demoniac.

"Howl, darn you!" Meekins swore in exasperation. The next instant he exclaimed more piously, "Oh, Lord!" for St. John was standing by the fire, asking: "What's the bally din about, Meekins?"

Red, irritable as a sleepy child, answered: "The wolves is spoofin' us."

St. John caught on that somebody was being spoofed. "Ah, really!" he commented icily.

Peloo, who had crossed back to the fire, touching St. John on the elbow, said apologetically: 'Red's got one of his bad spells to-night."

"Dear me! What's the nature of his illness?"

"Oh, he gets 'em in the neck," Peloo answered evasively: "'Tain't lockjaw; it's packer's lump."

"Never heard of it."

"Well, Red's got two big lumps on the back of his neck; they come from packin' heavy things like stoves an' pianers that rubs against the muscles. An' to-night they're kind of sore. Guess I'll turn in," he added abruptly, as he saw Red's hand reach for a stick of wood.

"Wait a moment! If he's in pain, a little whisky——" St. John made a dive for his black bag. At the magic word Meekins sat up with a hand on the back of his neck; he gave a groan.

St. John thrust his hand into the bag, only to pull it out and stand scratching his nose. Red's heart sank with foreboding. Peloo moistened dry lips as he hung on the Englishman's movements.

St. John put the bag down. "Devilish stupid of me," he explained; "but I remember now. I had a swig the night I was out in the launch; must have left the bottle under the seat—too bad!"

"What do you know 'bout that for settin' in bad luck?" Meekins groaned as Peloo turned in.

"I read in a almanac that this was to be a year of disaster, but I didn't know it was hittin' at us in pertic'lar, Red."

Grasshead watched the two white men settled

to sleep; then he turned to the trail of thought he had been following. Undoubtedly Squabo was up to some evil. Whatever it was, Squabo would probably wait until he, sitting there, tired, fell asleep. Even now the Cree was watching him from a slit in his eyes.

A plan occurred to Grasshead—an Indian plan. He called softly to the Cree: "Ho, boy—boy! Ho, boy!" If the Cree had been asleep he would have wakened quicker. "Smoke," Grasshead said, when at last Squabo's eyes were wide in questioning. "Come, boy!"

He held Peloo's brown plug of tobacco in the dim light of the little fire, and, drawn by the loadstone, Squabo came and sat beside the schemer. When he had filled his pipe Grasshead said: "Sitting here I sleep. I am tired."

"Lie down, brother," the Cree advised. "Sleep, even as the white men."

"Are you not afraid?" Grasshead asked.

"Of what?"

"That is why I *am* afraid," Grasshead answered; "because I, too, ask of what? But, brother, you are brave. If you watch, I will sleep. Keep the tobacco; from now till the time of work is four smokes."

Grasshead, as he lay down, turned his back to the fire, and the Cree, seeing this, said to himself: "This horse-stealing thief of an Ojibwa really means to sleep; it is not a trap."

He sat by the fire and watched it grow to a dull

mound of sullen coals. He pulled a handful of moss from a rotten log and dropped it on the fire; the firelight was gone, and the slow-lifting smoke from the smoldering moss thickened the curtain of night that hid him, even in the soft moonlight, as he slipped to where his few belongings lay.

Grasshead must have dozed for a minute, for he did not see the other's going. It was as mysteriously silent as though the shadows of the forest had crept a little closer and embraced the Cree. One Wolf, his slobbered jaws turned toward the forest, now rose from his haunches and followed.

The Ojibwa stirred, and with a grunt opened his eyes, turning them toward the fire. Then he looked for Squabo's blanket; it was gone. He lay for a minute, thinking; then he rose, and, throwing a strip of birch bark on the fire, by its light stooped and touched Meekins on the arm. "Ho, Ogama!" he said softly.

When Red opened his eyes sleepily, Grasshead explained that Squabo had deserted, and he wanted the rifle to bring him back.

From beneath his shaggy brows Meekins eyed the Indian furtively. Grasshead read the suspicion, and, passing the palm of his right hand quickly across the back of his left, made testimony that he would act aboveboard, and not underhand.

Meekins pumped the magazine of his rifle empty, then shoved one cartridge into the barrel. As he did so Grasshead held up two fingers, but Meekins, shaking his head, passed the weapon to the Indian,

who, with head hanging forward from the stooped shoulders, slipped to the trail that Squabo had taken.

Wider awake, misgiving took possession of Meekins. He sat up. This wakened Peloo.

"Who turned on that gas?" he growled. "Talk 'bout the snake room in any booze joint; this's got 'em all skinned for no rest. Hello! Where's Grasshead—and Squabo?" he added in astonishment.

When Meekins explained, Peloo commented: "All I can say is that Grasshead bein' our one best bet in this gold-mine hunt you more or less throwed away our chances."

"What's botherin' me," Red declared, "is the idee that I may never see that gun again. Grasshead an' that other Injun may be puttin' up a job on us. They're headin' for the canoe, an' I'm goin' to string with 'em. You'd best watch that nobody kidnaps English."

CHAPTER VII

Meekins, holding the moon over his right shoulder, struck out with the swift certainty of a woodsman. Almost subconsciously he ran a mental diagram of the course Squabo and the man who trailed him would take. Half a mile would take them to the first big bend in Red Sucker Creek, then they would hug the south bank till they came to the Pipestone Falls.

Soon the ripple of water running over a stony bed told Meekins that he was rounding the big bend. Now the trail crossed stretches of sand dotted here and there with jack pine.

"I must be catchin' 'em," he muttered as he rose out of a hollow into a long sweep of sandy ridge. "Must be catchin' 'em if they ain't got wings."

Now he was in a clump of jack pine, their stunted, blackened arms throwing grotesque shadows upon the sand. Under the shaggy brows the blue eyes of Meekins were peering ahead through the tangled network of light and shade. Suddenly he stopped. A shadow had crossed a patch of moonlight. It was like a reflection traversing a mirror. Yes, it had not been fancy, for now a huge, horned owl, startled by the something ahead, swept by.

Meekins circled to the left and pushed forward, watching where he placed his feet. Indeed, the yielding sand, with its thin covering of turf, was like a heavy rug. Suddenly he checked and slipped behind a tree. Twenty yards ahead something holding life moved; it must be Grasshead. But Meekins was puzzled. Why did the Indian make such slow progress? If he had caught sight of Squabo, why did he not push on, close in on the Cree? A memory of the look in Grasshead's eyes as he begged for more than one cartridge came to Meekins. Was the Ojibwa stalking his prey, striving for a shot in the open?

As he pondered this matter Red travelled. Now and then he caught a glimpse of some one that was

making about the same progress. Meekins was unarmed; therefore caution must govern his movements. It might not be Grasshead, and the way things were going even Grasshead might do anything. Red knew that he was gradually working closer to the one in front, but it was a tantalising pursuit—losing the thing he pursued in the heavy shadows and catching glimpses of it in the patches of light. After a quick traverse of a sloping hill he suddenly came to a halt. Not five paces away a figure leaned against a poplar, the shoulder showing from either side against a moonlight space beyond.

The figure by the tree suddenly straightened; the hands were in movement. There was a quick gleam of glinting light where a moonbeam, thrown through the foliage, had caught the steel barrel of a gun.

Like a sprinter shooting out from his crouch, Meekins threw himself at the man whose head was dropped to the stock of his gun. As his outstretched hand reached an arm there was a spitting flash of fire, the crash of an explosion, and together the two went down. To Red they fell a thousand feet. Something had struck him almost fair between the eyes; the heavens were ablaze with fervid lights; his brain reeled. He fought grimly, slipping, slipping now almost over the edge of unconsciousness, now gasping his way back, and always clinched with a devil that fought for the grip of his throat. A hot breath choked him; a face pressed close to

his, sought to savage him. Now they were up again.

Locked in each other's arms, neck to neck, Red's hand found a powerful leverage in a grasp of the other's cartridge belt. He could feel his enemy slowly crumpling under his bearlike hug. But his brain, clouded by that first smashing blow between the eyes that must have been from the kick of the rifle, worked with half-drunken slowness. Suddenly the belt came away in his grasp, and he went backward, clutching at the empty air. The hard impact brightened him; he was up, but his antagonist had gone.

As Meekins plunged across the open ridge a man stood out in the moonlight and called to him to stop. With a curse on his lips he broke into a run. There was a flash, the crack of a rifle; he could hear the singing *ping-g-g!* of the leaden missive. He checked for an instant to balance his mode of attack. As he turned his face in the moonlight Grasshead called: "Ho, M'sieu Red—it is Grasshead! Don't fight!"

Meekins, mystified, suspicious, kept on guard while the Indian talked. He explained that as he had trailed Squabo he had thought himself followed, and had doubled back on his own trail to entrap the unseen one. But whoever it was, he was a devil of the woods. Not once had Grasshead seen anything more than a quick, blurring shadow. Then had come the crack of a rifle and the dull thud of a bullet as it buried its leaden nose in a tree

trunk just as he had slipped behind it. Then Grasshead, having but the one cartridge, had waited for the oncoming of his hidden enemy; that was all.

Meekins looked at the cartridge belt he still unconsciously held in his hand. "It was Felix I had the grapple with," he declared. "These shells're .45's; they'll fit that gun. Guess I've pretty near cleaned him out of ammunition, anyway."

He slipped some cartridges into the rifle, saying: "Well, march! Now we've started let's get that Cree, or see what they're up to."

Then they passed through the forest with eager swing. Clouds scudded across the sky, driven by the rising wind that sighed and wailed. At times came the shriek of an angry gust through the lean, cutting boughs of the pines. Once Meekins threw up his hand and paused in his stride. A note caught his ear; it was unlike any noise of the clamouring trees.

"One Wolf!" Grasshead said.

When the droning song of Pipestone Falls told them they were close the two men cut to the left, coming out on the stream a hundred yards below. They stood behind a curtain of wild raspberry and listened, peering out upon the dark waters. From downstream a grating noise like the rasp of a paddle against a canoe came to their ears.

When they came to the pool below the silver sheet of falling water all was still except the booming roar. The canoe was gone; there was the little trough out in the mud where it had been shoved

from the bank. Meekins struck a match, and, crouching, held it over the footprints of the man who had taken the canoe.

Taking a match from Red's hand, Grasshead, holding it in the cup of his palms, rapidly searched the mud bank. "Not Injun," he declared; "that One Wolf not go."

With startling confirmation at that instant the wolfish snarl of Squabo's dog went up from a spot ten yards deeper in the woods. As they stood silent they could hear the dog whining. But there was no word from his master, no movement in the woods.

Then Meekins and Grasshead separated and drew an ever-narrowing circle about the spot where One Wolf hovered. At last they came to Squabo lying dead, a red-splashed vent in his breast, and his face, greenish yellow with the death pallor, turned up to the overhead moon.

"Why did Felix stick a knife in him?" Meekins asked.

"Don' know, me. That breed bad medicine."

They covered Squabo with stones and left him to the lonely vigil of One Wolf, who sat on his haunches, looking stupidly at the curious tepee that now held his master. As they trailed back to camp, their spirits heavy with the gruesome night's work, the mournful howl of the dog came to their ears at fitful intervals.

"I'm glad that beast didn't follow us; he gives me the jimjams," Red said.

As Meekins was slipping beneath his blankets the shaggy head of Peloo rolled over, and a bead eye peered at him inquisitively.

There had been no noise over the coming of Meekins, but it woke St. John. He sat up and looked about; then he rose, and, filling his pipe, sat on a log, warming his hands over the red embers that were left of the fire.

Soon a pallor, cold and gray, crept into the sky on the eastern side of Loon Lake, and far up its shore a whistling of roused waterfowl came intermittently. Rising higher into the pale-green sky, a harrow-shaped wedge of geese threw back to earth their bell-like "Honk-honk-honk!"

St. John watched the curious panorama of the night fleeing backward into the forest.like something of life slipping away from the betraying light of approaching day. An unseen brush swept gold leaf across the pallid sky; then long, livid tongues of vermilion red cut the gold. Above a faint rose tint deepened to crimson and bronze, and higher still in the vaulted dome, blue, ineffably sweet, appeared. Then ascending shafts of stronger light radiating from the sun gave warmth and palpitating life to the sky.

Enchanted, the city dweller hung expectant on the glorious phenomena of the breaking day, the call to life. His pipe grew cold in his tense fingers. A rim of molten fire, at first vermilion, came slowly upward from beyond the lake, its warm light tipping the tiny wavelets until the surface of the waters

was like a field of cloth of gold jewelled with rubies and sapphire and amethyst.

With unconscious tribute to the majesty of dawn, St. John took off his hat, muttering: "Glorious!"

But his dream mood was at once shattered by the prosaic lament of Peloo at his elbow: "I ain't slept a wink. Talk 'bout back to the soil for a quiet life! Dang it, there ain't no such thing on the trail! 'Em two Injuns an' Red had nightmare, an' an ant crept into my ear to hide from somethin'."

"Where's Squabo now—I haven't seen him this morning?" St. John asked.

"Me an' Red couldn't stand that dang dog, so we told him to light out. We don't need him, anyway."

Then, while it was still in his mind, Peloo crossed to where Meekins was rubbing his eyes, and said: "I just spoofed English 'bout Squabo. There ain't no use worryin' him 'bout things on the side."

"I should 'a' shot that dog," Red muttered. "I hate to think anythin' 's goin' to starve." He pulled on a boot and added: "You best pack that dynamite in some moss for English; keep a few sticks out for my pack—there ain't no use havin' all our eggs in one basket."

As Peloo stood up he pointed to a white-faced head that projected from the rim of spruce brush, as its owner carefully visualised his probable reception, and remarked: "There's that desolate pup you was worryin' 'bout, Red. He's lookin' for you."

As they ate breakfast Meekins studied the map. "This says eight hours northeast of Loon Lake is

an old Hudson's Bay Company blazed trail. This trail is four hours to the crossin' at Moose River. If nothing' happens, we'll camp at the crossin' to-night."

St. John made a mental calculation. "About three miles an hour—thirty-six miles. Quite a jaunt, eh, what?"

"We're headin' into a muskeg country with the trail overboard; we'll be goin' some to make one mile an hour," Peloo said grouchily.

When they had finished the meal Red called sharply to Grasshead: "Put a pail of water on that fire, nichie!" He turned to St. John: "It's fellers like him that's stripped the timber in this north country. It ain't rained here for a month, an' everythin's as dry as a bone. Even the muskegs we come through is dry; they ain't like the muskegs we went through to Felix's mine—the rock holds the water there. These muskegs was all made by beavers dammin' up streams, so they dry out. It's terrible what a fire'll do to 'em when it gets started."

"But really," St. John answered, "it doesn't make them any easier to travel. The long grass winds around a chap's legs, and at times, where it looked quite dry, I simply went to my knees in ooze."

CHAPTER VIII

At first the trail led across uplifts of primary rocks, cross-fissured, but worn to smoothness by

glacier action. On such going St. John was in a ferment of nervous apprehension, a slip might bring him down on top of the essence of eruption which he carried. Peloo, whose thoughts toiled during hours of physical labour over the most trivial incidents, possible and impossible, had been turning this thing over in his mind.

At ten o'clock they had their first spell, a tiny camp fire with a pail of tea. Another stop was made at noon, and then came the long grind of the afternoon.

After a third spell at four o'clock they took up the trail again, Red in the lead, picking up the blazed trail almost obliterated by time, the scars left by the woodsman's ax all but healed. At a suggestion from Meekins, Peloo, rifle in hand, brought up the rear, and as purple shadows commenced to dim the arched openings between the giant spruce his wary eye searched with keen attention the forest for their unseen enemy.

One Wolf, with his animal instinct, read signs that their eyes discovered not. Almost at Peloo's heels he hung. Once Peloo called to Meekins: "This pup thinks we ain't goin' fast enough; he's crowdin'."

Meekins read the message; that the dog scented danger from their mysterious foe, and that Peloo wanted him to travel faster. With a feeling of relief he heard the babble of waters, for the blazes had become imperceptible; he had been travelling more by a sense of direction than by sight. "Here's

the ford right 'nough," Meekins declared; "let's hike across."

They waded through the water waist-deep, St. John floundering and slipping on round bowlders till he was wet to the neck. On the other bank, Grasshead soon had a blazing fire. Peloo explained to St. John the somewhat anomalous relationship that existed between wet clothes and a cold: "You just stand by that fire, mister, till you steam yourself dry an' you won't get no cold. Even if you had a dry suit here an' made a change, we'd have to take you to the hospital in the mornin'."

Meekins had pitched the camp where he could keep an eye on the ford. As they sat drying themselves by the fire Peloo said: "Judgin' from that fool dog's acts, I'd say Felix beat us to the crossin'."

Erratic as One Wolf had been, his present demeanor was still more mystifying. He was possessed of an insatiable curiosity which caused him to make peripatetic incursions to the woods, always in one direction. They could see him circling and hear him sniffing. Once he sat on haunches, and, raising his wolfish jaws, sent upward a discordant complaint.

Grasshead hurled a brand at the dog, crying angrily: *"Marsh! Atim!"* Sundry bits of pork and bannock caused him to forget his troubles for the length of time he was gulping them.

As if the unrest of One Wolf had spread to Grasshead, he proposed after supper that they move

the camp a mile farther along the trail. After the manner of a redskin he advanced first one reason and then another for this unusual proceeding. As Trout and Meekins exposed the fallacy of each the Indian finally said: "This bad camp for sleep. That white man buried jus' there. Injun all say come ever' night on trail an' make trouble—plenty trouble."

"That's what's worryin' the pup?" Peloo suggested.

"Mebbe," Grasshead grunted.

"We'll camp right here," Red interjected. "If this place's s'posed to hold spooks, the live ones that's botherin' us'll keep away; we'll get some sleep."

"By Jove, that's a ripping fine idea!" St. John declared. "If you want seclusion and quiet, associate with ghosts. Devilish odd, that!"

CHAPTER IX

After supper the men sat around the camp fire, smoking moodily. Even Peloo, after one or two attempts at raillery, lapsed into stolid silence. He unearthed a needle and thread from some hidden place of deposit in his clothes, and was sewing a right-angled rent in his overalls.

St. John, numbed with physical exhaustion, lay on the ground, his head and shoulders propped against a birch log that Grasshead had rolled up to the fire, idly watching the erratic movements of Meekins.

He saw the latter examine a little, upright post that had been driven in the ground on the river bank; then Red searched the ground all around the post. St. John saw him stoop and pick up something and return with it to the camp fire. Then he sat down, and apparently proceeded to play a crude game of forest chess with three little sticks, moving them back and forth, wrinkling his brow, the monotonous puff-puff of his pipe almost the only sound that broke the solemn stillness.

Across the camp fire Grasshead and One Wolf were curled up in the attitude of sleep. At times the dog raised his head, his wolfish ears pricked, and read the semicircle of the darkened woods for the scent of something evil; then he dropped his lean-jowled head across his paws, the eyes, lighted by the fire, glowing like moonstones.

A wild peal of demoniac laughter brought the Englishman to his feet with a cry of: "Good heavens!"

Straight down the river a voice came, nearing them with terrific speed; it was as fiendish as though a lost soul had been sent hurtling through space.

Meekins did not look up. Peloo, a quizzical look of amusement in the eyes, adjusted the thread in his needle, remarking: "That's about the best-named critter that ever was; a loon he's named, an' plumb looney he is."

The raucous-voiced bird had startled others in the forest. A stately owl, somewhere close at hand, chided in heavy tones the disturber; then, as if

seized by a sudden passionate desire to outdo the loon, with a shrill scream he swooped down from his perch and swirled away into the bush.

"By Jove, I appreciate your remarks about a quiet life on the trail, Trout!" St. John commented, with a laugh.

Meekins threw his little sticks into the fire, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and said: "I guess that's 'bout the way it figgers out. That cussed dog has only got one kind of brains—the kind that remembers. Injun dogs are all like that. That herrin'-gutted pup see that body over there once. They're all afraid of a white man, 'specially a dead white man. Squabo was the guide that come to Loon Lake with the feller that got killed."

"Pardon me," St. John said apologetically, "but you said they sent Squabo back."

"Ho, Grasshead!" Meekins called. When the Indian sat up stupidly, Red asked: "Can canoe come from Moon Landing here?"

"Yes—long road."

"They sent Squabo back to bring the canoe to this crossin' to wait," Meekins resumed. "Why I can't just make out. P'r'aps they thought they'd pack out a lot of free gold. Then they come over the trail, goes right on, an' finds the mine. Guess there was so much gold it puts the Killer to the bad. He slips away at night, takin' all the grub. He's planted the bad cartridges in the tenderfoot's gun. He means to get Squabo an' the canoe an' hit the wide outside an' register the mine. He's sure his mate'll

starve to death, an' if anybody finds the body the verdic'll be, 'Died of exposure an' want of nourishment.' "

As Meekins lighted his pipe, St. John offered encouragement. "It's as good as Doyle; you're a forest Sherlock Holmes," he commented.

Peloo was on the point of solving the mystery of who Doyle was when Meekins forestalled him by resuming: "When the Killer strikes this crossin' Squabo ain't arrived; the Injun thinks they will be some time at the mine, so he don't hurry—puts in a lot of time sleepin' an' eatin'. The Killer is in a fix. He don't want Squabo to take the tenderfoot out, don't want 'em to hook up. It might be that this Moose River had swelled up from a big rain an' he couldn't cross. P'r'aps that's why, when he hears the man he'd robbed comin' along like a bull moose, he dropped him with a pinch of lead—'cause he couldn't get away."

"Why didn't he swim it?" St. John queried.

"There ain't none of these half-breeds could swim across a street gutter; they've got as much likin' for water as a mad dog."

"Ah, now, how do you know it was a half-breed?"

Peloo, looking up quickly, saw a flutter of confusion in Red's face, but the latter answered: "I ain't said it was a half-breed."

"But, Red," Peloo asked, "how d'you know the Killer didn't wait for Squabo?"

" 'Cause we know he took the dead man's rifle an' pumped her empty at Loon Lake. Besides, he

leaves a lyin' message for the Injun that him an' the other has both gone back by trail, an' to take the canoe back to where he come from."

"Somebody must've wrote you a letter 'bout this, Red," Peloo commented facetiously.

"They did, though they didn't mean to. I got her right here," and Meekins picked up a square of birch bark. He held it spread out in the light of the camp fire, and the others saw on the yellow, leatherlike inside of the bark figures drawn in charcoal. Two men were drawn walking toward a tepee. On the top was an animal, which, after a joint debate, they agreed was a bear, largely because it was less like any other animal.

"I thought it was a bear," Red said, "but it bothered me if it is. At first I thought it meant Squabo's dog." He handed the bark to Grasshead.

"Him Muskwa—white man call bear. That Squabo's name, Muskwa. Squabo his lie name."

"That's how she reads now," Meekins said. "'Muskwa, us two men goin' back to tepee,' meanin' goin' home. Beside the post this was stuck in I found an arrow-headed stick driven in the ground leanin' toward the ford. That's the way an Injun leaves word of which direction he's travellin' in."

"Why didn't he wait for Squabo when the other man was not to be feared?" St. John persisted.

"He just was feared of him, of his ghost. He couldn't sleep. He lights out when the water lets down—if it was up. When Squabo comes here his

fool dog noses that body out; then Squabo hikes out an' keeps the canoe."

"The Killer even stole the dead man's gun," St. John remarked bitterly.

"At first he'd take it, bein' too clever to leave it as a mark who the skeleton was, an' then it was so like a new toy he didn't throw it in the river, but hung on to it till he got to Loon Lake. You see," Red offered, "it's hard to figger out just how a feller workin' under that kind of pressure acts; he gener'lly always does some high-class fool things. About half my guess'll be wrong."

"By Jove, you're getting on! You've discovered one party, Squabo. If you could only get him now, he could tell you who killed this Englishman——"

St. John stopped abruptly as Red, turning his face quickly, ejaculated: "I ain't said he was an Englishman."

St. John, recovering from a little confusion, said hastily: "You called him a tenderfoot; I thought only Englishmen were supposed to be green in Canada."

Meekins, changing the subject, but making a false step himself, declared: "Squabo will never tell who it was now. Dead men tell no tales."

"Is Squabo dead, too? I didn't know that." St. John's eyes were wide in astonishment.

Peloo interposed: "Grasshead says a pack of wolves chased Squabo after he left camp that night; he heard 'em. It's a sure thing they got him, 'cause the dog come back to us."

There followed a space of depressing silence. They all carried mental packs filled with the brooding gruesomeness of the gold trail. Even St. John, materialistic Englishman, felt it. Peloo, to whom small talk was as knitting to an idle woman, broke the oppressive stillness. "Did you know a Lord Happyland in England, Mr. St. John?" he queried abruptly.

"What—eh, what?" St. John gasped; then he coughed. "Pardon—must have swallowed some smoke. What did you ask, Trout? Ah, yes, I know; I know a Lord *Hapland.*"

"You was speakin' of English greenhorns a minute ago, an' it made me remember one that come to Haileybury. He was the only one of the tribe I ever see make good. He was some man—but, Lord, he was a fool to himself! They called him Lord Happy, an' I heard his father was Lord Happyland; he might've been that same friend of yours, Hapland."

"He wasn't a friend," St. John corrected quickly. "I just know of him in 'Burke's,' you know."

Peloo didn't understand the allusion to "Burke's Peerage," but his next words again caused the Englishman confusion: "As the firelight hit your face a bit ago you looked as if old 'Happy' sat there; I got a start."

"Interesting, I must say," St. John commented. "Tell us about him."

"He was a boozer with a capital *b*. Even boozed, he was a gentleman, though, an' he had more luck

than a seventh son born in a caul. He didn't know enough 'bout minin' to be allowed loose if there was any dynamite about, but he goes out shootin' one day an' comes back to the Nugget Hotel with his pockets full of native silver. He had to get a feller to show him how to stake the claim. That was the 'Tewey Mine,' an' she was some mine. He sold it an' went into the bus'ness of supportin' the town —bums an' all; didn't make no dif'rence to Lord Happy. A feller sold him a diamond ring, then borrowed it back an' sold it again to a feller that gave it to his girl. When Happy found a girl had it he just laughed. They trimmed him, what with loaded mines an' loaded cards, et cetera; he was down to waitin' for the remittance that used to come from England. One day I come into the Nugget bar, an' it was plumb high tide—they was up to their knees in booze. Things had been dull in Haileybury, as the boom had took a sick spell, so I kind of wondered what had happened. I see 'bout ten of 'em swan-necked bottles with goldy locks on the bar, an' the fellers was so full of the bubble-water that they was just playin' with it. It makes me dry now."

St. John was laughing, and Red spat in the fire with a growling curse.

"Kind of rubbin' it in," Peloo observed, "but it ain't meant. I asks Smooth Hagan, the barkeep, what's it all about, an' Hagan says, 'Gad, all the boys's got money again! Lord Happy's made another strike.' "

Peloo filled his pipe. When it was lighted he added: "It didn't last long; a suit over the mine helped break Happy. Then he got a pointer from a little priest he had given a big wad of money to for his mission. He lit out, an' ain't been heard of since. He'll turn up some day with a million, I bet."

"How long has he been gone?" St. John asked casually.

"'Bout six months, I guess. I ain't been in Haileybury for a year, an' only heard 'bout how he finished up."

"Perhaps this poor man was Lord Harry—I mean——," St. John broke off in confusion.

"Lord *Happy* we called him. It was just that thought that started me talkin' 'bout him. He was just the feller to trust that damn breed—I mean whoever it was with him," Peloo resumed.

St. John turned to the Indian: "Did you put a headstone to mark his grave, Grasshead?"

"I blazed big cross on tree," the Indian answered stolidly.

"I'd like to see it—will you show me, please?" But Grasshead had cramp in his leg.

"You're a squaw; you're afeared of the ghost!" Meekins declared scornfully. "Come on, mister, I'll find the blazed tree. I saw the place that fool pup was makin' goo-goo eyes at."

The early night was clear, an afterglow, and they soon found the tree with the sacred scar, its black cross showing against the silver-white birch bark.

There was no mound manifestation of the tragedy. As Meekins ran his hand casually down the blaze he gave an exclamation of discovery; then he struck a match. Its light showed a silver cigarette case fixed in the blaze, being held there by a sinew thong.

"That was very decent of the Indians," St. John said.

"They wouldn't take the dead man's traps, 'specially something that was no good to 'em. The Indians always put on a grave things like a pipe or a fire bag, as they call the pouch the Injun carries his tobacco an' matches in; they think he needs 'em on the journey to the Happy Huntin' Ground. What does that read?" And Meekins pointed to a monogram or crest on the case.

St. John examined it closely. "I can't make it out; just his initials, I should say."

Meekins pretended to examine the ground, and, moving in a circle, drew away from the tree, leaving the Englishman there. Presently St. John joined him as he stood waiting, and the two returned to the camp.

When Meekins related to Trout the incident of the cigarette case, the latter declared that it was Lord Happy buried beneath, for that gentleman had clung to his cigarette case always. "I'm goin' to have a look at it in the mornin'—I'd know it," he declared.

"I guess you'll have to get up early," Meekins remarked as he turned in.

CHAPTER X

One Wolf must have been quiet and the ghost off duty, for the tired Peloo slept until he was awakened by his woodsman's ear; something was stepping cautiously near him. It was Meekins, and it was broad daylight.

"Where you been?" he asked suspiciously, as Red sat down.

Meekins jerked his hand in the direction of the grave. "I've been over there—it's gone."

"What! The cigarette case?"

"Yes."

"Felix got it?"

"No, Felix ain't been there. I kind of got an idee, when I was over there last night, that case might disappear, an' I wanted to make sure which one of two fellers would get it. I stuck a couple of matches in the string so a hawk-eye breed could see 'em—or, if it was kind of dark, feel 'em as he reached for the toy. I put a couple more on the ground; they was all there just now."

"Felix might've missed 'em in the dark."

"He wouldn't go near that ghost hole in the dark for a million; no breed would. He'd go before we was up. I thought he might go there to see if we'd dug up anything."

"You think English took it, then. P'rhaps he was lookin' for a brother or somebody that's got lost out here."

Meekins ran his fingers through his shock of red

hair, then he said: "We got to dig that body up for him—that's if he wants it. I'm goin' to make a play that I want to see who got plugged."

Grasshead had breakfast ready, and, as they ate, Meekins sprang his proposal on St. John; the latter, innocently swallowing the bait, eagerly commended the plan, declaring that he had an idle curiosity himself.

When the body that was in its shallow grave was lifted out, Peloo sank his teeth into the knuckles of his fist to smother an irreverent guffaw. The dead man was heavy-set, swarthy-featured, with the undeniable stamp of commonness about him. Red stared, then he looked at Trout sheepishly.

St. John, who had stood by with his eyes fixed in intense eagerness upon the body as the two lifted it out, gave an audible sigh of relief; he drew in a deep breath and straightened up as though a load had slipped from his shoulders.

"Don't look much like one of 'em cigarette dudes, does he?" Peloo commented. "A chaw of nigger-head tobaccer'd be more in his line. He's 'bout as far apart from Lord Happy as a codfish is from a canary."

Meekins pretended to make a discovery. "Holy Moses! If that cigarette case ain't gone!" he exclaimed. "Felix must've grabbed it in the night."

Peloo turned to St. John. "Red was tellin' me 'bout findin' that cigarette case last night, an' I was afeared that Lord Happy was buried here. He was the only man I ever knowed would pack one of

'em toys into the woods. Wish I'd seen it; I'd know at once if it was the one old Happy had."

The Englishman hesitated; he coughed; his face flushed under the mental struggle. Here was a chance for him to settle the very question that was in his mind. Suddenly he shoved a hand in his pocket, and, thrusting the case toward Peloo, asked eagerly: "There it is. Is that the one you saw your Lord Happy have?"

Peloo turned the silver case over in his hand and examined the crest. "That's him. You must've picked it up where it fell, eh, Mr. St. John?"

"I guess we'd best bury this poor chap again," Meekins interrupted.

When they returned to the camp, St. John said: "I took the cigarette case off the tree. I—I was afraid—I mean——" Then he seemed to come out of a momentary confusion. "I think I had better confide in you gentlemen. I'm really looking for a relative. A very near relative came out to this country, and—and—that is, we have lost touch with him. There is some weighty matter pending—in fact, there is a title kicking around loose, and I'm inclined to believe that the Lord Happy you know is—is—that is to say, might be the missing man. And I feel tremendously pleased that this other chap was murdered—I mean that it wasn't Lord Happy." The usually calm Englishman had become ambiguous under the strain of confiding family matters to comparative strangers.

"We may get some light on how this other chap

come by that smoke box when we get to the gold mine," Meekins suggested. "Looks like as Happy must've been in the party."

"You don't think he could have shot this man, do you?" St. John's voice trembled over the question.

Meekins ran his fingers through his scarlet locks; and Peloo, seeing this sign of worrying thought said: "That's so, Red. Him an' the other feller that was at Loon Lake might've had trouble with this duck, though old Happy wouldn't murder nobody."

"If the feller that went in with the Killer come back here with him, they wouldn't go on to Loon Lake; he'd wait here for Squabo an' his Peterborough to get out of these parts with. But he didn't, 'cause Squabo had the canoe. If they was both here, Squabo wouldn't think there was anythin' wrong."

"I guess the feller that went in with that murderer didn't come out again," Peloo declared.

The trail they now took up was difficult. The blazes had been made long ago and were hard to follow. But as they plodded through muskegs and over fallen timber, Meekins made a discovery—the blazes suddenly were fresh, but a few months old. As he explained, perhaps the two men going in had cut fresh blazes to expedite the coming out. After this discovery, they travelled with more freedom. A thick haze obscured the sun all day.

It was about four o'clock that Meekins stopped

suddenly, slipped his pack, and, hurrying forward, thrashed about in the wood. St. John and Peloo, not understanding, were puffing patiently at their pipes, at times a forceful word of profane caste coming to them from Meekins' vicinity.

"Red's doin' a work-out," Peloo explained. "When he's that talkative to himself there's some just cause; we best wait."

Meekins had sent Grasshead on ahead; the Indian now returned, grunting angrily: "No trail; him lost!"

"What's wrong, Meekins?" St. John queried.

"We've been follerin' a blind trail, that's all. I ought to've known there was some hell'ry on when I struck that thief's blazin'." Red pointed at the sun that had emerged from the haze. "That red-faced snoozer shows me that I've been goin' straight north for some time, follerin' this crooked lead. If I'd looked at my compass, I'd've found out in time."

"But these blazes ain't new, Red; Felix couldn't've run 'em to steer us wrong."

"They was new in the spring. See what the Killer done. When he was leavin' the other man he runs this false line of blazes, startin' at some place the other feller would pick it up as he was chasin'. When the Killer come to here, he stops cuttin' blazes an' takes across country, as any Injun or half-breed could. His idee was that the tenderfoot would foller it to here, then get lost tryin' to get across, an' starve to death. By some chance

the poor feller must've overshot the decoy trail an' kept straight on the old line to Moose River."

The sun buried itself in a bank of smoke that filled the sky. Red turned to Grasshead, asking: "Where is Bitter Lake? We're six hours north of the proper trail now—it's too far to go back."

The Indian swept with his eyes the encircling forest and slowly indicated the direction in which the lake lay.

"Can you catch him, Grasshead?"

"Yes, mebbe; plenty muskeg."

"Well, we'll make a try for it," Meekins declared. "We'll go as far as we can to-night, camp, and to-morrow pick it up in daylight." He looked at his compass, taking the direction of Bitter Water Lake. "We won't need this unless something should happen to Grasshead. He'll find the lake, just as a horse'll travel for a week an' strike his own stable."

The Indian took the lead, but Meekins hung at his heels, his rifle slung so that its stock was under his right arm. "Bears is terrible cheeky this time of year," he explained to St. John.

Moodily, without exchange of speech, they marched. St. John had been tired yesterday, and the day before that, but now his spirits were heavy with a weariness of body and soul.

They had dipped down into a monotonously flat country; stunted spruce and cedar, and occasionally a labyrinth of dead tamarack, all killed by a grub pest. Struggling to keep pace with the others, St.

John watched through his sun-bleared, fly-blistered eyes the forms of his companions. They loomed fantastically unreal, plodding, plodding over the interminable flat of the cedar-studded valley. Their titanic forms moved easily forward, never resting, never hesitating. Resistlessly, with no movement of complaint or dissatisfaction, the ungainly Peloo pursued the tower of packages that topped the form of Meekins beyond. St. John pressed palms that were greasy with hot sweat to his temples; his brain was in tortured turmoil. In his ears, distinct, was the thumping pump of his heart, clogging with its thickened blood. He wanted to cry out to the others, begging them to wait while he rested just for a little. He put a hand to his neck and felt the veins that stood out like cords. A cedar root, crawling aimlessly through the soggy moss, wandered over his feet, and he splashed heavily into the ooze that was still sending up bubbles from where Peloo had passed.

Trout passed in his stride over a log, looked back, and asked: "Are you all right?"

St. John struggled to his feet, spat the black mud from his mouth, and, yielding to irritated nerves, answered sarcastically: "Yes, I'm feeling much better, thank you. It has really done me a lot of good." He glared at Peloo and inwardly added: "The devilish ass!"

Peloo chuckled and settled down to the log between his legs. "It's kind of heavy goin'," he said, waiting while the Englishman dug from

beneath his collar and out of his hair and eyes the plastic mold; "but these swamps is good for a feller, in some ways; they ease your feet if you've been hittin' the turnpike much. I remember once I was for 'bout a month straight on end on a trail that'd fell overboard, an' 'bout the finish of it I just shook the corns out of my boots same's hailstones. I'd been terrible bad with corns, too."

St. John put his hand on Trout's shoulder, saying: "If ever you come to London, my dear sir, you must dine with me at my club, and relate some of your experiences to the fellows."

"I'd be very glad to, mister," Peloo agreed, quite innocently.

Meekins, during the little halt, had whipped out his compass. He studied it with evident perplexity. Grasshead stood silently watching him.

"Is Bitter Water east, Grasshead?" he asked.

"Him east," the Ojibwa answered.

With a forefinger Meekins beckoned. "See?" he queried. "We've been travellin' south; we're just out a full quarter of the circle."

"Little clock speak lie; him no good," the Indian declared.

"Peloo," Red called, "come an' look at this. I've give up knowin' anythin' 'bout the woods. Soon's I get out I'm goin' to buy me a plug hat an' a b'iled shirt an' settle down in Toronto. Pers'nally I have an idee the earth is kind of cut from its reg'lar bearin's, an' is, so to speak, a foul ball to-day. That north is straight behind us, an' that

east is correspondingly up where we allowed north was."

"We got to go by the compass or by the Injun," Peloo offered.

"I never knew this compass out yet," Red declared.

"Clock no good," Grasshead growled. "See him?" and he rubbed the moss from the side of a birch tree. "That side north—tree got good coat: *Keewatin* (the north wind) cold." He pointed to the tops of the tapering spruce and slim-growing poplars that were obviously leaning in one general direction. "Southeast," he declared. "Northwest wind strong, blow all time—bend him when little."

But Red was obdurate; a good compass wouldn't lie, and sometimes Indian signs failed. He was going to stick to the compass till he got a correct direction from the sun, or, at night, the Big Dipper.

CHAPTER XI

Then they travelled for hours; finally they came to an uplift of sand hills. Solitary, isolated trees seemed to have crept up out of the more luxuriant swamp to wander disconsolately over the unkind sands. Suddenly a turmoil in the distance caused Meekins to slip the tump strap from his forehead, drop his pack, and stand, rifle in hand, waiting.

Through an opening he saw a man approaching diagonally. He was moving with alacrity. With a snarl, One Wolf charged to intercept the runner.

"That feller's breezin' along like a quarter-horse," Peloo commented. "Somethin's chasin' him, an' from the humpy way of gallopin' it's got I'd say it was a bear, Red."

"Whatever it is, first feller don't like him—he's tryin' to give him the go-by."

One Wolf had thrust himself into the pilgrim's line of vision, and the latter became aware of the dog's associates. Curving his eager run, he headed in their direction. One Wolf rushed to meet him. The sight of the dog's fangs caused the wayfarer to hesitate, but one furtive look over his shoulder, and he resumed his speedy flight. One Wolf also caught a glimpse of the bear, and, turning tail, he headed the approaching procession.

It was an exciting contest of speed. The man, in spite of his earnestness, was losing ground. The staying power of his pursuer was evident; the farther they travelled, the closer the bear got.

"If nobody interferes, the man'll lose," Peloo adjudged.

"What had we better do?" St. John queried.

"Just watch Red; he's got a down on bears.

Suddenly Meekins' elbow shot out; the lean black barrel of the rifle belched forth a little cloud of smoke; the bear checked, shot forward head over heels, rose, clawing at his side, and spun around like a top three times. The man kept on running. Then the bear sat back on his haunches and stared in their direction, a stupid expression of wonderment on his face. The rifle barked again. The big black shaggy

head drooped, wagged heavily from one side to the other, and then the massive body slipped to the ground over on its side, where it lay, the limbs twitching spasmodically.

One Wolf whipped about again at the crack of the rifle, and, seeing the bear passive, he scuttled back to the dead animal and marched around it with stiff, poppy legs, the bristles on his back erect and vibrating, drawing his circle smaller and smaller.

The man had arrived. He stood for a second, pumping air into his lungs, eyeing Meekins admiringly; then he gasped: "Say, you was johnny-on-the-spot, right enough, that time, pard."

"You had a close call, sir," St. John said sympathetically.

The stranger looked at the speaker and declared indignantly: "Not on your life! I was a-leavin' him every jump. I never see a bear yet I couldn't outrun. He got close at first, but I never was a sprinter."

It was St. John's turn to gasp. He turned to Peloo, saying fretfully: "Most extraordinary chaps in this part of the world!"

"You fellers goin' to camp soon?" the stranger asked. Then, as if he had just remembered it: "My name's Baldy—that is, Archibald Slack in any agreements or such papers."

He looked expectantly from one to the other of the three men. Peloo cleared his voice with an apologetic cough and said: "Mr. Red Meekins,

my name's Peloo Trout, an' this gentleman is Mr. George Cawthra Sackville St. John, of London." Peloo had almost forgotten the combination.

Baldy Slack blinked his eyes and held out his hand to St. John, saying: "Glad to meet a gentleman from London in these parts, Mr. Jack Johnson. If it hadn't been for that fool bear, I could've made you to home at my camp, but he kinder upset everything."

"I guess we'd best camp here," Red advised.

"If you don't mind," Baldy suggested, "I'll go back an' pick up some things I shed strippin' down to runnin' weight. There's a hat an' a gun an' a coat back on the trail, there, that might come in kind of useful to me. I won't say good-bye—I'm comin' back."

As they pitched the camp, Peloo remarked: "That feller must've made a pretty good Marathon run, after all; he's been gone half an hour."

But presently Baldy returned, carrying, among other belongings, a couple of rabbits. He threw them to Grasshead, with the advice: "Make good ragout, nichie." He turned to St. John and added: "When I was outrunnin' that bear, back there, I stepped on 'em rabbits—they couldn't get out of the way fast enough."

As they sat around the ragout which Grasshead served in the frying pan in which it had been cooked, Peloo asked Baldy to relate the incidents of the chase.

"It was kind of my fault, to begin with," Baldy

asserted magnanimously. You see, these darn woods up here has got to be just about as full of people as Toronto or New York—I never see the like of what it's been this summer."

"Oh, I say, by Jove! You're spoofing us!" St. John objected.

"Not knowin' what spoofin' is, I can't say; but folks have been overrunnin' this section. Just see, here I've picked up you three fellers. This mornin' I dashed near gets plugged with lead from another tourist that somehow got detached from his bearin's."

"How d'you account for the rush—all the emigrants pilin' in?" Peloo queried solemnly.

Baldy had just filled his mouth liberally with ragout, but he managed to sputter: "Gold!" He nodded the complement of the sentence, masticating the ragout meantime. "You're lookin' kiddy innocent. Are you huntin' for a little mountain of gold that has wandered off into this swamp somewheres an' got lost?" he added, turning to St. John.

"I'm deadly anxiously to know how that bear come to pursue you," St. John answered.

"I was comin' to that," Baldy declared. "I'd been out all mornin'; guess I'd made a fifteen-mile traverse, an' after I'd chawed grub I lay down in the tent to rest. First thing I know, I'm waked up by somebody outside the tent. I made out his back, kind of shadowlike, right up against the canvas. I was kind of sleepy an' says: 'Come in.' But he sits there, an' he seems to be fingerin' over

my cache of grub. I gets r'iled, reaches over with my foot, an' lifts him one just where I thought wouldn't break no bones."

"I see, it was the bear," St. John cried jubilantly.

"That's easy pickin', seein' that you saw the finish. It were the bear, an' kickin' him made him mad. I heard him snort, an' grabbed a gun, an', quicker'n you could say Mississauga, the tent was snatched to one side an' we were off. I beat him to the start, but not much. I was just gettin' my second wind an' runnin' good an' free when I sighted you fellers. I brought him in, didn't I?"

"Yes, you led him in, right 'nough," Peloo agreed. "He mightn't've found us if you hadn't done the guidin'."

"That bein' so," Baldly said reflectively, "an Mr. Meekins, here, makin' the kill, we ought to divide him up—you fellers takin' the meat an' I the pelt. That's my line of business, trappin'."

"Travellin' for fur, so to speak," Peloo suggested.

"You was speakin' 'bout seein' a feller this mornin'," Meekins said. "Was he a short, stout old man with gray hair?"

Baldy cast a suspicious look at Red, muttering to himself: "I guess the game these three fellers play best is spoofin'." Aloud he answered: "That's a full an' complete description of what he wasn't. He was kind of long, a banana-coloured skin, an' his hair was a deep shade of blackin'."

Red shot a quick glance at Peloo. "You didn't

know who he was, then?" he said, addressing Baldy.

"No, never seen him before. An' I guess all this bad luck with the bear has come through meetin' that duck. I crost Pigeon River Portage, an' was headin' along that old blazed trail when I heard a sharp whistle. There was the feller I speak of, sittin' on a log, grinnin', and his gun's one eye is dead on me. I don't pay no attention to his gun, but walks right up to him. He just laughs; but, say, when that feller laughs it's just like a cussin'—it made me shiver. He wanted some .45's from me; said he'd shot his 'most all away. My gun was a .33, an' I only had a couple of shells with me. I told him I was plumb out, or I guess he'd held me up for the gun."

Peloo looked at Red. Red nodded, saying "That's a bit of luck to us."

"Guess I'll skin that bear," Baldy suggested. "You can have the meat, an' I'll have the pelt, eh?"

"All right. You was bringin' him to market when I shot him," Red answered.

When Slack had gone, Peloo asked: "Do you know who that is?"

"It's the man had the race with the bear, Mr. Baldy Slack."

"That ain't too funny, Red. Don't you know there's two Baldy Slacks in this north country?"

"Sure I do. One of 'em is called 'Loony Baldy,' 'cause he's nutty."

"Which one is this, Red? I'd say he was Loony Baldy, the way he talks."

"He wasn't so danged loony when it come to cuttin' up the bear. That pelt's worth twenty dollars, an' bear meat is tough fodder."

"Bear fur ain't prime yet; it ain't worth much. But Loony Baldy's like that; you can't tell at first. Time the Hog Lake rush was on, a feller comes up from New York an' hires him to take him in. When they was goin' through some rough water, Baldy starts explainin' he's the wise Baldy, an' it's the other Baldy is loony. He gets excited, upsets the canoe, an' New York's nearly drowned."

"He ain't got much on us, at that; when I get back from this snake trip I'm goin' to board in a asylum to straighten up," Red declared.

After supper, a pipe inclined Baldy to sociableness. "What do you say to that?" he asked, handing Meekins a specimen that was two-thirds gold imbedded in dull, rusty quartz. "I got it from an Injun named Muskwa," Baldy explained, as the nugget was passed around.

"Where did he find it? Did he tell you?" Red asked carelessly.

A cunning look gleamed transiently in the small, vulpine eyes set so close to the thin-bridged nose in Baldy's face. "If Muskwa knowed where it come from, he sure would tell me; an' you, comin' along just now as you have, I'd sure tell you—I guess not!" And Baldy laughed a mocking cackle.

"Who's loony now—this cuss or you an' me, Peloo?" Red asked, when their new friend had moved beyond earshot.

"He's got me guessin'. But our old friend Muskwa bobs up again."

"I guess Muskwa found that gold on the murdered man," Red said musingly.

"Felix was there first—he'd take it."

"Not Felix; he's too foxy. He'd leave the gold to make it look like an accident. He'd got all the gold he could pack, too."

As they sat around the camp fire, Baldy, who had been mentally debating what business the caravan was on, asked: "Where you fellers trailin' to?"

"This is an English member of Parliament, from London," Peloo answered hurriedly. "He's goin' to write a book on Canada, an' we're showin' him over the country."

"Where was you headin' for now?" Baldy queried suspiciously.

"Tryin' to get out, mostly. We was tryin' to locate a lake off there to the east." And Red pointed in the direction they had been heading.

"That ain't east; that's north," Baldy objected.

Meekins took out his compass, and, holding it in his palm, asked: "What d'you say now?"

Baldy looked dubiously at the quivering needle that hung vibratingly to the point on the horizon he would have called west. He sat down on a log, and, taking off his cap, ran his fingers through his long hair. It was certainly puzzling. Suddenly he slapped his thigh, jumped up, and let out a whoop of joy that startled even Grasshead. Then he sat down on the log again and laughed till the woods echoed.

"Which Baldy is it now?" Peloo whispered mockingly to Red.

"You're gettin' a lot of fun out of somethin'," Red said angrily, glaring at Baldy.

"I ain't laughed none for a month; let us in on the joke," Peloo pleaded.

Slack stopped his hilarity as suddenly as he had started it, and, thrusting an arm out in the direction Meekins had called east, declared: "That's north; I don't need no instruments to find direction. Your compass has got in touch with the Moose Head; that's what's the matter."

"What's the Moose Head?" St. John asked, thoroughly puzzled.

"It's a mountain of iron 'bout ten miles off there, the way the needle's pointin'. But that's west. You fellers ain't the first lot of tenderfeet I've picked up in these parts that old Moose Head was playin' the fool with. There's a lake called Waho Heap off this other way—east."

"Could you make it from here?" Red asked.

"Say, if it was staked an' a two-inch auger hole through the stake, I'd walk to it with my eyes shut an' slip my finger through that hole same's it was a weddin' ring."

"You're the very feller we want," Peloo declared emphatically. "There ain't nobody in this party could find his way from the front door to the bar in the Nugget Hotel."

Baldy's explanation showed that Grasshead had been right and the little clock wrong. Under

stimulus of the victory over Red, Baldy waxed loquacious. St. John's penchant for asking questions directed Slack's vocal intent toward that gentleman.

"You see, Mister John," Baldy said apologetically, "bein' alone in the bush an' thinkin' all the time, talk kind of gets bottled up in me, an' I froth over like beer when I get a chance at somebody. Fellers go loony from bein' alone in the bush for months at a time, an' no one to talk to."

"That's a true bill, Mr. St. John," Peloo commented. "I've known some myself."

"I've got a namesake, Baldy Slack, that's off. He used to drive a lift engine in a mine, an' he thinks a nut's worked loose on a bolt in his head; he can hear it rattle."

Baldy's weird chatter irritated Meekins. To change the subject, he asked: "Why didn't you locate where that gold come from?"

"It's ha'nted. I wanted Muskwa to help find it, but he didn't dare go near it. It's called the Devil Mine by the Injuns; there won't one of 'em go to look for it, even. They say anybody that finds it dies."

"They call that talk bull con up in this country," Red said. "I've heard that lost-mine story ever since I heard of mines. Gener'lly the feller that knows where 'tis gets a wad of money to show it an' lights out. We'll give you a job guidin' us to that lake."

"I'll take you to the lake," Slack agreed, after a pause, "but if you're gold huntin' you can follow

that compass from there. I wouldn't trust my own brother when it comes to findin' a big cache of gold —it turns a man into a devil."

As they turned in for the night, Peloo pointed to One Wolf, who was curled up, his nose covered by his bushy tail, and said: "He knows Felix is 'way off somewhere an' ain't snoopin' round to pot somebody. I guess Felix has beat it for the mine, an' we're gettin' close."

CHAPTER XII

Evidently, Felix had moved on, for the night was quiet—that is, up to about dawn. Then One Wolf, as if feeling that he had neglected his accepted mission of keeping his friends on the qui vive, began a restless prowl, given variety by canine notes of dissatisfaction. He did not show the same spasmodic ebullitions of alternate fear and rage as he had when Felix was about; instead he seemed agitated by a sense of some unknown danger.

Meekins, who had been awakened by the dog, was growling about it at breakfast.

"It was too monotonous in the night," Peloo declared perversely. "I've got so on this trip I don't sleep good less there's a racket on."

"Wonder, rather, what the dog was troubled over," St. John remarked.

"Anybody that ever saw a dozen trees ought to know," Baldy answered. "See that, you fellers?" and he pointed his knife to the sky that held a

sudden red haze. "The bush is afire, an' my advice is you fellers best beat it for some nice place where the daily papers'll tell you 'bout what happened. Anybody that gets ketched in this bush is goin' to frizzle up."

"There ain't no hurry," Peloo protested. "That fire's a long ways off. I see the sky like that for a month once when the big fire was in Michigan hundreds of miles away."

"Did you pick up signs like this that time?" Baldy asked, holding in his hand a gossamer-black skeleton of a burned leaf. "It's snowin' these to-day, an' you didn't see a bird around for two days; they know."

"Well, let's head for that lake; it ain't on fire, is it?" Red asked crossly.

They broke camp, and as they streamed over the ridge along which Baldy had raced the day before they came to his camp. Slack, who was in the lead, stopped where his tent lay in a crumpled heap. "I guess I got to cache a few things, boys, if you don't mind waitin'. Guess I'll kiss 'em good-bye, too," he added, with a look at the sky.

Peloo slipped his pack and took out his pipe. A nice round knoll, with a particularly heavy cushion of leaves, suggested a seat. Peloo accepted the luxury, only to give vent to a fearful yell and claw at the earth in a vain attempt to rise. Meekins, thinking that Peloo was kidding Baldy over the bear incident, laughed. His mirth was checked by

Peloo. "Come here, you danged red-headed fool, an' help me out; I'm caught!"

Baldy emerged from his tent, and with one glance at Trout darted forward and yanked him to his feet. Then the cause of that gentleman's outcry was patent. Clinging pertinaciously to his form was a huge bear trap, both jaws locked firmly over his hips. Luckily his width of beam had not allowed the trap much of a start on its vicious snap, so beyond two lines of punctures, much as though an alligator had bitten him, Peloo was none the worse for his experience.

"Now I got to go an' set that trap all over again," Baldy was growling after it had been detached from Peloo.

The latter, walking about in a short circle and rubbing his quarters, retorted petulantly: "Why didn't you say there was traps set about here?"

"Guess I'd ought to have notices posted upon the trees round, sayin' 'Trespassers will be persecuted. Beware of traps!' "

"Well, get a move on, an' you go first!" Peloo commanded crossly.

That was a day of monotony. Earth took on the dead aspect of an object seen through smoked glass. Back somewhere the forest fire had sucked the air into a vacuum, had burned the life out of it; it parched the gold seekers' lungs as though exhausted of oxygen. It was viscous of texture, suggesting a body of deep fog. Perspiration streamed from their skins. Even Peloo's jocund humour had

ceased to enliven their way. Meekins plodded, plodded with sulky indifference. Baldy, possessed of that curious sense of enjoyment which, vampire-like, nourishes upon the mental distress of others, harped monotonously upon the terrors of the fire that was licking up with its tongue of flame the northern forest.

St. John felt the depressing forecast of disaster more than the others; it irritated him. Once, as he and Peloo rested as they lighted their pipes, he said: "Some way, since we've shouldered our garrulous friend, Baldy, I feel like Sinbad the Sailor, don't you?"

"It's a good many years since I sailorized on the lakes," Peloo answered; "a good many years. I knowed most of the sailors then; he might've been since my time."

The Englishman opened his mouth, on the point of laughing, but checked himself with the heroic thrust of a finger into the hot bowl of his pipe, burning it, which brought forth a growl of pain.

Then with the silent monotony which had become habitual they slipped into the harness of their packs and went forward through long hallways that stretched, in the computing of tired minds, for miles and miles between walls of spruce and pine that held the heavy hush of catacombs. No bird notes lilted.

St. John, struck by the vocal vacuity, harked back in memory to that small forest on the Duke of Richmond's estate wherein no bird ever wings.

"They know!" Baldy croaked, as they sat around the camp fire at noon.

"Who knows what?" Peloo asked.

"He was sayin' back there"—Baldy thrust his thumb toward St. John—"that there wasn't no birds."

"You took a devil of a time to think it out," Peloo retorted sneeringly.

"When I'm trailin' with my eyes on a blind trail I ain' got no time to give the life hist'ry of the animals," Baldy growled. "An' I'm sayin' now for the gentleman's information that the birds knows that the fire is ketchin' up, an' they've flew their kite."

"Cut it out!" Meekins snapped.

"Yes, really," St. John added, "we ought to chirk up a bit, I think, and talk of something agreeable."

The fatigue, the strain, the procrastinated result was putting a wire edge on their nerves.

"You're right, mister," Peloo confirmed. "Once when I was out in the Cariboo gold field, an' the bed slats fell out, lettin' the camp fall so hard it bust the boom, six of us started on the hoof express for Peace River. Well, we gets snowed in, we was put down for the winter, same's jam. We builds a shack. We had guns, considerable provisions, an' game was as easy as the public in boom time. We're all as friendly as 'em little huggin' monkeys you see in a circus till Bad-luck Davis—that's what he was nicknamed right enough—shoots an animal 'bout the size of two tomcats, an 'nails

the hide on the side of the shack. None of us fellers had ever seen that kind of a critter before. One of 'em says it's a ground hog; another says it's a little kind of bear; McGinnis claimed it was an otter; McLeod names it for a lynx; an' so they go on—there was six kind of animal 'mongst the six of us. We argies an' disputes, an' gets mad over it—danged near fights; an' first thing we knowed nobody was speakin' to nobody else. The one what's cookin' would dump the grub on the table, an' no fear he'd say, 'Gentlemen, will you please oblige by takin' your seats at the banket?' No fear! He'd just grunt—that's what he'd do. We was sleepin' doubled up in three bunks, an' the fellers slept back to back. Holy Moses! I used to go off into the bush an' talk to an owl or anythin', fear I'd get tongue-tied. One day an Injun come along. We all made a rush for him, lugged him round to where the skin was stuck up, an' asked him what it was."

Peloo put a coal to his pipe. St. John, who had waxed eager, cried: "What was it, Trout? Who won?"

"Nobody. The Injun said it was a *carcajou*. That was a new one on us. We found out he meant wolverine, but nobody called it that—we never seen a wolverine. It was such a sell on the fellers we just laughed. That settled the row."

"Look here, Trout, it strikes me you're no end of a philosopher," the Englishman said appreciately in a low tone.

Peloo's rather longish story, related in the most noble spirit of conciliatory warning, was like the seed that fell upon stony places. Baldy spat contemptuously into the fire and sneered: "You must've been a lot of greenhorns not to know a wolverine from a ground hog. It's fellers like that gets lost in the bush."

Meekins slipped into his pack and started. Peloo stretched his long stride till he was at the latter's side. "That cuss makes me cross," he commanded.

"You hadn' ought to take no notice of a feller that's loony," Red reproached.

"He ain't loony; he's the other Baldy."

"You've been arguyin' that he's the loony one," Red contended irritably.

"You was the one said this was the loony Baldy," Peloo said, with sharp reproof.

The mental disease broke out again. They went ploughing along, wrangling over this, till Peloo said: "Danged if I know which one of us said he was the loony Baldy, an' I don't care. He ain't the loony Baldy; he's just a cussed danged fool!"

St. John's brain, inflamed by the scalding contact of superheated blood, revolved peripatetically around a myriad of subjects. He caught himself talking rot as if he had fever.

Toward evening they travelled into a graveyard of dead trees that stood draped in black. Some former fire had sapped their life, had scorched the cuticle of bark until the sap no longer raced to the breathing leaves.

"The Valley of Achor! The Valley of Achor!" St. John repeated a dozen times. Sometimes a small log hidden with a covering of moss and dead grass would catch his feet and he would reel drunkenly, even fall; sometimes he laughed idiotically; sometimes he cursed. But always there were the unsympathetic backs slipping away from him, their unchecked progress insisting that he make up the lost ground.

Once Peloo took a hurried, backward glance; then quickening his pace, he drew close to Meekins, saying: "You keep close to that loony feller with the baby's rattle on the end of his neck, Red; he may try to jump the job. I'll trail behind the lord mayor of London—dash him, he's 'bout as near bushed as I ever see a man."

"Yes," Meekins answered, "if he was to fall, an' we didn't notice it, I wouldn't give much for his chances. Back there where we come through the marsh I see the pugs of a bear, an' he was travellin' free; he'd seen somethin'."

"P'r'aps we started him up."

"No, he'd been comin' toward us, side-wheel pacin' like a two-minute horse."

Peloo turned, growling: "Danged if I wouldn't like to see that cuss that's ha'ntin' our trail just once. Talkin' of seein' things, Red, can you make out anythin' of a wanderin' Willie back there in the forest glades?"

Peloo was searching their back trail, a puzzled expression on his grimy face. After a moment of

scrutiny he dumped his pack irritably, growling: "Gol-dang 'em foreigners, anyway!"

There was a note of alarm in the voice of Meekins as he said quickly: "We best get back on the lope, Peloo."

With difficulty Meekins kept pace with the long-legged Peloo, who was muttering: "We ought to get the medal for savin' life the way we're takin' care of this cuss. What you got, Red?" His voice had whispered the query, for Meekins had clutched his arm and was staring off among the cedars.

"Somethin' flitted. It may've been a wolf or some critter. Come on, Peloo, let's get along; I don't like this."

The next instant, as Peloo pushed through a tangle of stunted birch, his foot struck something that had the unmistakable yield of flesh. One look, and he cried aghast: "Somethin's happened English!"

Meekins dropped to his knees and put his arm under the body of St. John; then sitting, he lifted him into his lap. "Poor old chap!" he said brokenly. "I'm afeared they've got him."

"Just tuckered out, ain't it? He's just dropped off. He'll be all right, Red." Peloo was talking against fear.

"He ain't just tuckered out; people don't get blue under the gills an' go so far out that they don't have to breathe when they're just tired."

"Oh, he ain't dead; don't say that, old man.

There wouldn't nobody do him up. Can't be; there ain't no blood."

Peloo in his intense sympathy, childish in its words, was fanning St. John's face with his wide-brimmed hat. "Give him somethin', Red; ain't you got nothin'?"

"His heart's still on the job," Meekins said, after he had run his hand under St. John's shirt. "There ain't no sign of a cut, and it couldn't be a shot; we'd heard it."

Meekins was examining minutely the Englishman's torso and head. On the neck he found something, and with a muttered curse of astonished anger said: "Here, Peloo, hold him; rub his side." Then he searched the ground within a radius of ten feet, even feeling in the carpet of dead leaves for something. Suddenly, with an exclamation, he held out for Peloo's inspection a slim, blunt-headed arrow. "That's what he got—right there," and Meekins laid his finger on a red blotch just behind St. John's ear.

"By the horn-swaggled owl, if that ain't Injun work! He wouldn't take a shot. He got that bow in Squabo's canoe. I guess we was just in time. Poor old chap! Say, Red, he's gettin' back. Come on, old man; you can't come too fast."

They could hear St. John breathing now, a rouge was chasing the blue-gray pallor from his face.

"I'd give up my diamonds, for a hooker of whisky for the old cuss," Peloo said; then he laughed, as a woman might, in hysterical weakness

after a strain. "You danged old Johnnie Bull, you're as good as half a dozen dead men yet. We was just in time, old sport."

The gothic-structured Trout cuddled the unconscious man across his gorilla chest.

"Best set him agen the log there, Peloo," Red advised. "He'll think it's one of your dang-fool tricks if he wakes up an' finds himself in your lap."

"Eh, God bless me, gentlemen—by Jove!" It was St. John mentally reeling back to their company.

"How're you feelin', mister?" Peloo asked.

"Groggy. I don't know what happened; I went down like a shot."

As Peloo turned to pick up St. John's pack he growled out an oath. It had been opened. He thrust in his hand; then quickly tying the tumpline about the pack, swung it to his shoulder.

When they had recovered their packs, and the impatient, growling Baldy having been given the word, the caravan proceeded. With all appeal to finer sentiment removed, Peloo slipped to the other extreme of petulant intolerance. "What's the idee, Red; ain't we to tell his highness about the arrow?"

"No."

"What'll he say when he finds out somebody sneaked the dynamite out his pack?"

"What! Did that devil get the powder? What's he goin' to do with it?"

"P'r'aps he was lookin' for the whisky an' just took the stuff for deviltry, thinkin' it would bother us."

"I give up guessin' what that breed's up to about anything; we'll tell English the dynamite slipped out when he fell."

After a season of quiet, Peloo asked querulously: "Are we goin' to plug along all night? Where's that lake? It seems to be travellin' as fast as we are."

"It's afraid of a noise," Baldy sneered; "only way to trap that lake is to talk less an' walk more."

CHAPTER XIII

In half an hour the dark interior of the wood was broken by a glint of cold, greenish light, as though a huge mirror, lying face up, reflected the day's dying pallor. A rank odor, acrid, nauseating, filled their nostrils.

"Bitter Lake," Peloo advised. "It's got a breath like a pot of sour beans."

"It's filled with champagne!" St. John declared, feeling the relief of escaping from the woods.

"It's most like a tub of stale beer; I'd rather sleep in a vacant lot," Peloo growled as they came to the water's edge.

Slack slung his pack against the roots of a giant spruce with a full flavor of resentment. Sullenly silent, he took an axe, felled a dead birch, and built a camp fire. His moodiness seemed to affect the others; there was that vibrant irritation produced by the impact of unpleasant episodes in the mind of each man.

Meekins drew from a bag a bear ham, and automatically cut slices of its strongly-flavoured meat, which he dropped dejectedly into the frying pan. Peloo had found a little higher reach of sand just to one side, and here he abstractedly spread their blankets.

St. John, his tired spirits blanketed by the morose sullenness of the others, sat on a log and watched the preparation for the night in dejected indifference. A dozen times he almost followed the lead of his drooping head in a sleepy pitch to earth. Out of wonderland eyes he saw Grasshead, looking abnormally like some goblin in the firelight, come forward, a stack of tin plates in his hand, and one by one deal them toward the men as if he were trying to disembowel them with the throw of a discus. One Wolf sat across the fire, its light glazing his eyes, now green, now blood red, now gray translucent, like moonstones. The Doré-like morbidness of his environment caused St. John to exclaim: "We ought to have the walrus here."

Peloo drew the back of his hand across his mouth and growled: "A man that wouldn't find dog-bear meat rank enough, but wanted walrus, must have a pickled palate."

"I meant like the ship's carpenter, don't you know, where he said to the walrus: 'It's time to talk of many things,' " St. John explained.

Peloo looked at the speaker; then, taking his plate, sat down; his movement was a direct rebuke. To Meekins, at his shoulder, he said under his

breath: "Why in blazes does fellers want to go fuzzy in the nut just 'cause they're tired? An' there ain't been no sun to-day, neither."

Slack, hearing the latter part of the observation, sneered: "You don't expect to see the sun when the sky is full of smoke, do you?"

Peloo's retort was one of unexpressed contempt; he spat in the fire and blew his nose. This irritated Baldy. He was possessed of a nasty desire to vent his spleen with primal revoltiveness. He thrust a grimy hand that carried a fork across the person of St. John, jabbed viciously into the frying pan, retrieved a morsel of meat, and drew it back with tantalizing deliberateness across the latter's legs, leaving little streamlets of grease to mark its passage.

"Oh, by Jove! I say, do be careful, sir," the latter remonstrated. This drew from the offender a grunt that ramified in the realm of insolence. The success of this exploit appealed to Baldy's debased sense of humor. He presently impaled a piece of bannock and explored the fry pan with this obsorbent. The return journey was once more distressingly repulsive to St. John, who again objected.

Peloo reproved Slack with less courtesy of speech, only to draw from the latter a limpid stream of blasphemy. Peloo put his plate down, saying: "I'm goin' to kick that scrubwoman into the lake."

But Meekins nudged him in the ribs, and directed his attention to St. John, who was saying: "There

has been a curious development in profanity in England."

Baldy ceased to swear, and turned his eyes suspiciously on the speaker, who continued: "There was a time when only the serfs used oaths; then later on the serfs and the gentry swore; then came another change, only the gentlemen swearing. Now no gentleman uses profane language."

Baldy's lower jaw had gradually fallen away from the upper; his beady eyes had passed in transition from a look of incomprehension to one of sullen anger.

Peloo slapped his thigh and laughed: "Ha-ha-ha, haw-haw!"

There was a vicious suppression in Slack's voice as he asked: "Meanin' me, eh? That I ain't no gentleman because I can pack more than enough to make a bed for a cat? Because I ain't a pot-bellied cockney."

"Hold on there, Baldy!" Peloo commanded, his long body rising like a tower of restraint.

"You mind your own bus'ness," Slack retorted, springing to his feet. "I'll learn this cockney to tell me that I ain't no gentleman."

"Quite right," St. John commented, rising and stepping to where the ground was more level. "This concerns me, I mean," he said apologetically to Trout. "And now, Mr. Slack, if you'll be good enough to apologize for your beastly expressions we'll say no more about it."

"Apologize?" It was really a derisive shout.

Decorous preliminaries were eliminated. Either enraged haste or a quick snap of treachery guided Baldy, for the next instant, his long arm swishing through the air like a flail, he hurtled at the Englishman.

The unexpected happened. A compact bunch of fives was successively launched with fortunate precision, and Baldy lurched diagonally, overbalanced, and went down.

When he rose Peloo and Red had a hand on each shoulder, and Peloo was saying: "It's just good to be alive to-night, Baldy, an' see what we've seen, an' if you're still disgusted with the quiet life an won't promise to behave, we're goin' to keelhaul you out there in that bowl of slop to cool you off."

"What d'you say?" Red queried, and gave Baldy's shoulder a yank.

Slack took out his pipe and filled it, preserving a gloomy silence. He lighted it, walked down to the edge of the water, and stood there smoking and eyeing the heavy, sombre sky.

St. John was lying down on the blankets, and Peloo, intoning his voice to leap just the intervening distance between him and Meekins, was saying: "It's just as I said, Red; Johnny Bull'd be all right if it wasn't for his dang-fool way of speakin' English. You see, it took him so long to get that out that Baldy had time to get mad. If he'd spit it out all at once—told Baldy he was an uncurried horse from the backwoods—there wouldn't've been nothin' to it."

"We ain't got no kick comin', Peloo. Baldy got what was comin' to him."

But the miraculous efficiency of St. John's punch had astounded Peloo; he wanted to know how it had been possible. He crossed over to the Englishman, and, taking that surprised gentleman's arm in his big hands, appraised the biceps, saying: "That biff on Baldy's soundin' board was some beaut, mister; how d'you learn that trick."

"As a boy I had as tutor an old navy officer, and as boxing was the only thing he knew thoroughly, I had to learn it. Later, at school, I fagged for Lord Blossom, and he was no end of a boxer—champion for two years at Oxford. A chap never forgets to put up his mauleys once he's learned the game."

Presently, Slack returned to the fire, saying: "I've brought you to the lake; my contract's up, so I'm goin' to pull my freight. I want my pay."

St. John jumped up, and, giving Baldy his money, said: "Don't go off into the woods at night—deuced foolish. Forget our dispute and make yourself comfortable by the fire. We'll have ducks for breakfast; must be some out on that lake."

"I got a raw deal, but it ain't that. Nobody but a dang fool would camp on Waho Lake. You talk about ducks; nobody ain't never see a duck nor any other livin' critter on that lake. Nobody ain't never see a moose come to it, nor a beaver, nor a muskrat, nor an otter. There ain't even a polliwog in it, 'cause it's ha'nted; that's why. The *loup-garou,* the

devils in the flyin' canoe, goes over its waters."

Grasshead's Indian eyes, the piercing black pupils bordered by a red-and-yellow crisscross, were fixed on the speaker. He made the sign of the cross in quick subtlety, and crept a little nearer the fire.

Slack continued: "The wolves that howl on its banks are not flesh-an'-blood wolves; they're the devil wolf. A bullet'll go through 'em like a bank of fog, but they can pull a man or a moose down just as if they was alive. You'll hear 'em to-night. I wouldn't take all the gold that's in the lost mine an' go through it. P'r'aps you'll see the man of Waho Heap."

The three men gazed at Baldy in astonishment. The queer, weird tale of the haunted lake that he had no doubt heard many times seemed to have touched his eccentrically balanced mind.

"You'd best camp here, Baldy," Meekins advised.

But Slack packed his blanket and some bacon and bannock, and strode away into the forest, declaring that he had a good camping place a few miles out on his line of traps.

"What do the Indians say is the story of the lost mine, Grasshead?" St. John asked.

But it took much diplomatic endeavour to get the Indian to talk. It was a fanciful tale. Grasshead had heard it from his father, Standing Shot, who had had it from his father. The legend ran that some priests had found the mine, and were getting much gold from it. But the Indian chief of that part was a pagan Indian, and he was afraid that

the gold would bring many of the gray-eyed people (whites), so he killed the priests and all their men and hid the bodies in the cave where the gold came from. There was a spring of water which flowed from the cave, and the dead bodies poisoned this, and, the Indians drinking it, got a strange illness that killed them.

Grasshead told the story with a dramatic retrospectiveness, the firelight playing fitfully upon his red-bronze face. As he finished, the trembling wail of a wolf across the lake broke the forest hush; the cry was echoed in an answer from another wolf.

"I guess the wild dogs have winded Baldy," Peloo said.

"Have any Indians found that mine?" St. John queried.

"No Injun won't come by trail that goes Waho Heap—bad medicine."

Meekins was studying the trail map. "We got to pick up that little stream that runs into this lake to-morrow mornin'. Follerin' it we come to the place we see the big lone pine on the rocks."

"I'm glad Baldy won't be there," Peloo declared. "One minute I'd bet my right eye against your little toe he was the loony Baldy, an' the next I think he's just playin' off. I don't never want to see him no more."

As Peloo uttered this heart's desire they were startled by the attesting sounds of something speeding through the forest in their direction. Meekins sprang to his feet, rifle in hand.

"I wouldn't bother, Red," Peloo advised; "it'll be Baldy with a new collection of jimjams. Most like he see the sea serpent in the lake."

Peloo's hazard of regret was confirmed by a voice in the wilderness crying: "Don't shoot, fellers; it's me—Baldy." His voice had a streamer-like effect, showing that its owner was speeding.

"How'd you find things gener'lly while you was away?" Peloo asked as Slack stood by the fire replenishing his bellows.

"Ah, that's what drove you in," Meekins said as a chorus of wolf cries came from the forest that had just yielded up their guest.

"I don't run from wolves; I stand an' club 'em off," Baldy declared indignantly. "I see more'n wolves; I see the man of Waho Heap Lake. He was walkin on the water an' was all on fire with a blue blaze all over him."

Meekins cut irritably at his plug of tobacco, grinding the fragments viciously in the palm of his hand. Peloo winked at St. John and yawned. No one spoke. The silence, suggestive of unbelief, angered Slack into words. "Say, you fellers don't believe I see the ghost man, eh?" he rasped.

"We don't care, Baldy," Meekins answered. Turning to the Indian, he said: "You watch till half-night, Grasshead."

Before turning in, Meekins said to Peloo: "We're headin' straight for that country that Felix's mine is in; this is the same muskeg kind of country, too."

"I've had the same idee," Peloo answered; "but

that don't matter—a claim is only forty acres, an' this muskeg's as big as Lake Erie."

The tired men soon slept. The Indian scanned each blanket-covered form, reading the symptoms of sleep that left him alone; the one conscious of dread; the one the evil spirit would visit.

CHAPTER XIV

A long time Grasshead sat motionless. Presently in his nostrils, his senses all acute, he found the tell-tale perfume of burning balsam. By the slim spiral of smoke that drifted lazily from their camp fire toward the lake he knew that a west wind had carried the pungent odor, and that miles back on the trail the heart of a forest was being eaten out by this relentless destroyer that needed but a rising gale to sweep over the earth with the speed of a galloping horse.

Now his head drooped until his figure was a grotesque, rounded heap of flesh, blanket-covered. The birch sticks in the fire fell apart as they burned in two, and, spreading out of contact, the flames died fitfully; the red coals were just a sullen blotch. The blackness of the woods crept closer, lessening the circle that held it at bay. One Wolf moved against Grasshead's leg. Half waking, the Indian heard a whimper of fear from the dog. Slowly he opened his eyes, conscious that something had happened. He was looking straight out across the bitter waters of the evil lake; his heart almost

ceased to beat; fear chilled his blood till it ran cold. There plainly to be seen, was the man of Waho Heap, a figure of ghostly fire.

One Wolf slowly rose to his feet, a whine issuing from his slobbered lips. It wakened Peloo, who, sitting upright, looked out across the lake, and Grasshead heard him whisper, 'Holy Mackinaw! What's the meanin' of that?" Then he wreaked an unreasoning revenge upon the dog, lifting him with a sweep of his foot. The yelp of One Wolf brought St. John to his feet with a cry of: "What's happened—what's up?"

"No one answered. After the first startled query each one stood in silence, his eyes riveted upon the supernaturally lighted form that glided either upon the black waters of the lake, or around its shore, clothed in a blue-green radiancy. As they watched, it faded into darkness.

Peloo gasped a sigh of relief. The Englishman, conscious of a creepy feeling, said, with a laugh of apology. "My word! Devilish funny caper!"

"It's these dashed bush fires; the smoke an' dust that's in the air makes strange lights," Meekins explained in an unconvincing tone.

Baldy sneered; he uttered a sibilant note through his lips that was like a stray chord in a reed instrument.

Immediately the clamour of the wolf pack fell upon their ears off to the left of the lake; the bell-like drag to the yelps told that the pack ran, whether in the hunt or hunted. Now they came

close, fiercely discordant; the heavy sombreness of the wood re-echoed their din. At its height the clamour ceased. In the sudden hush was heard the scurrying of leaves, as though a shaft of wind shot by one side of their camp. "There they go," Peloo announced, swinging his long arm to the left. "I wonder what got 'em."

The dog had stood with bristled back, snarling, and, as the wolves swept by in silent haste, he dropped his tail and slunk to the side of Grasshead.

Where the wolves had bayed, the same ghostly figure they had seen flitted across the darkened lanes that lay between the spruce walls. With a growl Meekins grabbed his rifle, and, throwing it to his shoulder, pulled the trigger. As he did so the Indian's arm shot out, and the barrel was thrust upward, to belch its leaden bullet through the branches of the trees.

As Meekins turned angrily on Grasshead the latter said: "Ogama, that not good; the ball don't kill evil spirit—it make bad medicine for man that shoot."

Meekins glared at the Indian, and Peloo said: "We got a couple more hours' sleep comin'; let's turn in. Grasshead won't sleep none, so we needn't worry about a watch."

St. John was roused from the brief sleep that followed by the odor of frying pork. The depressing unrest of the night cast a lethargic heaviness upon their spirits. No greeting passed between

the men. Automatically they prepared for another day of unforeseen incident.

St. John took his towel and soap down to the lake. When he returned his appearance caused Peloo to exclaim: "Holy Moses! What you been doin' to yourself, mister?"

Red turned away to smother a laugh. St. John's hair and beard had grown long on the trip, and now they stood out in matted spikes, seemingly covered with hoarfrost.

"It's just impossible to do anything right on this trip," he complained. "I soaped myself well, and that bally salty water just caked the whole thing."

But even this grotesque mishap soon lost its cheery effect. They ate the fried pork in morose silence. Peloo, knowing that silence begets moodiness, sought to brighten matters.

"Once me an' a young English remittance feller went out chasin' a mine. In Haileybury he hadn't any use for water that I ever see, but when we hit the trail he's got a big tin bathtub on the wagon. He allows he's goin' to condition himself—get his pores open an' the bloom of health back. The first day out Sam Boddy lost the bathtub off the wagon crossin' a ford. Say, that Englishman had some cuss words I never heard before; afterwards he told us all the Oxford chaps knew them. The first mornin' he don't get no bath, an he don't eat none. The second mornin' he says he ain't slept none 'cause the moil—that what he called dirt—has baked his pores solid. He gets a half pail of

water out of a mudhole, wets a big bath towel he's got, ties it to a limb, an' climbs up an' down the towel."

Peloo's bead eyes watched for a smile on St. John's lips, but the latter only tried to pull his fingers through his barbed-wire beard. Then he said: "You don't happen to be, by any chance, a reincarnation of Baron Munchausen, do you, sir?"

Meekins, imitating Peloo's manner, added: "Once I knowed a feller could make up fool stories fast as he could gab." Then turning to Slack, who was packing up, asked: "Got a race on to-day with any the animals, Baldy?"

Slack's eyes were full of a crazy light as he turned them on Meekins. "Are you fellers goin' huntin' that Devil Mine after the warnin' you had last night? That sign means fire an' destruction." Then he swung his pack and strode away. In ten yards he stopped, and, holding his hand high above his head, repeated: "Fire an' destruction! Fire an' destruction!"

"Deuced cheerful chap, my word!" St. John commented when Slack had gone.

"That skunk's harder on the digestion than a soggy bannock. If he ain't the loony Baldy, what's the other one like?"

Peloo's query was answered by the booming echo of a heavy thud off in the forest. "Just a big pine that's tumbled," Red commented. "The fire eatin' along in the dry moss cut its roots."

"Let's get a hustle on; we ain't got no time to fiddle away," Peloo added.

Meekins led the way around the lake, looking for the feeder to the pool of desolation. The lake was half a mile across. Opposite to their night camp, they found a sluggish ribbon of bitter water. A disagreeable odor rose from the border of the stream, due to the deposit of sulphur and earth salts that slimed its banks and carried on a never-ceasing war of extermination against the encroaching vegetation. From rotting and decomposing ferns a nauseating stench emanated.

Meekins kicked large plasters of sulphur loose, saying: "That's where Felix got his fireworks. He made up for the part of the ghost man. We might find this cesspool mighty handy," and Meekins swept his arm toward the western sky. "The wind is from the east, but a big bush fire don't need anythin' to push it along."

They followed the stream that wound its snake-like way through a thick-growthed muskeg. When they rested at noon Peloo asked Meekins what he thought of the footprints they had crossed several times.

"I just can't make Felix out no more than I could all along. We must be gettin' near the beginnin' of this sewerage, an' that means that he'll play his biggest trump. I'd like to know what it's goin' to be."

Meekins did not wait long for the knowledge he desired. He saw Grasshead straighten his back

from the task of frying pork over the fire, and facing the east, expand his nostrils; then the Indian stolidly grunted: "Fire that side, too."

Peloo and Meekins sprang up, dread in their faces. A moment's concentration of their forest instinct, and they knew that the Indian was right. The woods to the east of them was afire; they were surrounded by it, caught between two leaping walls of destruction. The long drought had dried up the earth; the very undergrowth, the small bushes and ferns were dead. Their shrivelled forms, parchmentlike, would burn as tinder; the carpeted muskeg itself would feed the conflagration; the woven woof of squaw-tea shrub, first cousin to the wintergreen, with its coral berries, the wintergreen itself, the wild grass, the muskeg hay, the short wolf willow, the sweet grass, the moss, a veritable peat—all were fuel. And the wind that had risen in the east would fan the fire.

"It's that devil!" Meekins said. "This is the card he held in his sleeve."

"You know I often wondered," Peloo commented, "that he didn't put a shot over, as we was sittin' in the light of the camp fire. But this was the game; he kind of felt sure of baggin' the lot of us, providin' we didn't turn tail an' take the back trail in the meantime."

There was the scurrying rush of some forest creatures through the thick growth, symbolized by a noise like the rending of cotton. "It's the animals hikin' to cover," Peloo advised.

"Yes," Meekins admitted grudgingly, "we got to hit the back trail for Waho Heap.

As they trailed, Peloo shot a searching glance at St. John, mentally measuring the reserve force left. Woodsman as he was, Peloo knew that ahead of them lay in all probability a life-and-death struggle. St. John, tenderfoot, was the weak link in the chain. Grasping the latter's pack, without a check in his stride, he swung it to his shoulders, and St. John, relieved of the unaccustomed task of balancing the disconcerting weight, pushed forward at a freer gait.

The air hung dead and void, and yet it was vibrant with subtle currents. Above, through the opening of the trees, St. John could see a flowing stream of murk, a river of yellow-tinted gloom; its speed was rather felt than seen; some upper current bore it in a swift drift to the west. A hissing, singing note was in the air, as though bees swarmed from myriad hives. Gossamer flowers floated through the branches of the trees, and St. John knew them for the harbingers of fire—the burned leaves.

As they raised a rounded ridge of white sand, almost bare of trees, Peloo waxed exultant: "Good old Red! He's got a head as long as a horse. This'll check *him,*" and Peloo yanked his hand back toward the pursuing fire. "This'll get him guessin'. Time our friend has turned this sand into plate glass we'll have gained a lap. Come on you, Johnnie Bull; we'll just win this in a common canter. There

ain't nothin' to it. You'll have your bath in that little lake of brine an' feel as fresh as a daisy."

Then they dipped into a tamarack swamp, the tall, tapering trunks all dead. "When he gets among these kiln-dried dead ones there'll be somethin' doin'." Peloo declared. "He'll wax fat on this mouthful. Hike, English, hike!"

Every few minutes some animal raced by them—rabbits, foxes, lynx, a deer. Once a cow moose and two calves, the young pacing with a curious, shuffling gait, passed. "They know," Peloo growled; "they've got some inside information on this, an' they're beatin' it to that Slough of Despond."

In the end the fleeing men won to the goal of Waho Heap.

As they hesitated on the edge of the lake the animals, their timid minds filled with this greater dread of the fire, forgot the man fear and pressed to the very side of the human. All kinds did this. A bear, fat as an alderman, gorged on the autumn fruitfulness, stood sniffling, his red tongue protruding between white-frothed lips not three yards from St. John, his little pig eyes twinkling interrogatively. A bull moose, moaning plaintively, came crashing through the bush, his huge spread of antlers rapping the trunks like a woodsman's axe. His headgear was on fire, the velvet hanging in shreds from the lordly spikes was ablaze. Even he knew that his rage was against mightier forces than puny man. He almost galloped over Peloo in his rush for the lake.

The bull's rudeness stirred Trout to vehement denunciation. He shook his fist at the departing giant, growling: "You big whisky-nosed slob, serves you right to get your horns singed, havin' 'em in curl papers this time of year!" He turned to St. John: "He should've had 'em polished up clean before now; he's a boob. That's how he got caught in the fire."

Meekins was lustily swinging his axe into the pole of a dry popular. "Red's gettin' the timber out for an ark," Peloo explained. "You might've noticed the animals a-gatherin'. We're in the Noah bus'ness."

They soon had a fair-sized raft lashed together with their tumplines. The food supplies and blankets were placed on this, and then they waited for the approaching fire.

The dog, One Wolf, like his wilder friends of the forest, was filled with the essence of fear. He ran here and there, sniffing and giving expression to short yelps of discontent; his restlessness was like that of a caged leopard. He tripped over rabbits without recognition. The bear might have been a blackened stump for all the attention bruin received from One Wolf. His tongue, hanging from his lean jaws, dripped with perspiration, though he was burning with thirst. He lapped at the brackish water, and turned away with a whine of despondency. He was turning over and over in his mind the extraordinary problem of these men, masters by right of mental control, loitering here in the

shadow of death when they might, like the fleeing deer and the galloping wolves, race to safety. "Yelp, yelp, yelp!" he warned them.

It was Grasshead, more primitive than the others, who remembered the unpalatable quality of the waters. From a hole which he dug in the swamp some distance away he brought a pailful of water that in ordinary times they would have refused to drink.

"That feller maybe done us a good turn touchin' off this fire," Meekins said. "It'll burn out the small wood an' check the big blaze.

It was curiously like waiting for an approaching hurricane, where one can do nothing but just wait, held in the hand of fate. At first there was a solemn stillness, a smothering feeling as though they breathed compressed air. The atmosphere, trapped between the two fires, pressed upon them as a weight, and above was the lurid sky.

Then sudden, peripatetic gusts of scorching wind belched through the funnel openings of the forest, as though some dragon blew his poisoned breath upon them. Showers of charred twigs and leaves fell. Intermittent flashes of red flames seared the smoky gloom of the forest; the crackling hiss grew plainer. They heard the wailing dismemberment of falling trees; the thump of their bodies against the earth was like the beat of some gong; the timber growth of a century was dying. The air was the scorching breath of a furnace; it shriveled

their lungs; its vicious gas seared their eyes; vitriolic fumes clouded their brains.

To St. John it was like a huge pantomime, half unreal. There flashed a retrospective gleam across his mind; it was something he had read of Agamemnon standing on the walls of Troy watching new worlds being born. He was roused by the harsh, commanding voice of Meekins: "Get on the raft, St. John!" He heard Peloo say: "Hold her a minute, Red, till I catch that locoed pup; I can't bear to see an animal burned to death."

One Wolf was, beyond argument, locoed, or perhaps educated. All his life he had been pursued and caught for one of two purposes only—either to be beaten for some thievery or cast into harness for the dog train—so he adroitly eluded Peloo's grasp. Half a dozen times the big man reached out a hand, and each time he missed. Of course his humane impulse could not survive this contumely from a dog, and presently he returned to the raft, consigning One Wolf to the melting pot of Hades.

Then the raft, bearing St. John, was pushed out into the lake; and others, wading, held the log raft between them. Fighting, yielding inch by inch, driven back by the darting tongues of flame, the spitting coals, the belching gas, the men who held the raft went outward from knee-deep to where their hips were buried, and on still till the water, evil smelling, lapped at their chins.

"This is hell!" Peloo exclaimed, holding the back of his wrist to his scorched eyes.

"It's worse," Meekins confirmed, "'cause there you don't expect nothin' else."

"Well, I should say that after this there'll surely be a turn in the luck," St. John contributed from where he sat like a figure of Buddha, his legs curled beneath him.

"There ain't nothin' left but a snowstorm now," Peloo contributed. Even against the background of disaster his brush-whiskered face looked droll enough to inspire St. John with an intense desire to laugh. It was not unlike one of those grotesque, carved faces on a coconut floating on the surface of the water.

With frightened yelps, three wolves—mother and pups—skirting the lake shore, glided like gray shadows over the spot where they had embarked. The dog, swayed by the scent, the something of relationship, joined the wolves as they fled.

"Like rats desertin' the ship!" Peloo remarked.

"We walk in Inferno with Dante," St. John declared, with unintelligible irrelevance.

The conditions seemed to impose this mind segregation upon the men. The terrific conflict interposed a mental distance between them; they talked or sang, not caring about response.

Meekins knew a series of epic songs pertaining to lumberjacks, miners, and others, the opening line of each individual song being, "Come, all ye jolly farmers," or "Come, all ye men of toil," and so forth. Now he chanted the gamut of his repertoire with a happy abstraction.

Once Peloo thrust himself into one of Red's musical numbers, saying reminiscently: "I knew a feller once in a 'sylum that caught fire, an' he stood on the roof recitin' 'The Boy stood on the burnin' deck.' "

They became the victims of divergent tortures. Their limbs were incased in waters cold as the North Sea; their heads burned and throbbed with the heat of Hades; they gasped for breath, and now the wind, sucked into the vortex of the fire, rushed over the face of the water, lashing it into white-spumed waves. Above, the yellow sulphurous smoke, acrid from the burning pine pitch, clouded from view the sky, and the poisonous gases of a heavy gravity dripped earthward.

Maddened by the heat, St. John, too, slipped into the lake, dipping his head from time to time.

The Indian stoically clung to the raft, voicing neither hope nor fear.

The great fire had come up out of the west, the fire that had hung on their trail for days, and but for the despised miniature Dead Sea they would have perished at the meeting of the flames. All night they shifted, floated, waded, and swam on the little oasis in the desert of fire. The coming of day was almost imperceptible, for the darkness was great; it was like an eclipse. To the west the forest was still ablaze; to the east stood myriad blackened trees; but the fire had died down.

They drifted with the raft, leechlike clinging to its sides, to the eastern shore, and wearily pulled themselves up from the waters.

CHAPTER XV

When they had eaten, Meekins said: "We got to pull our freight out of here. The fire behind is goin' to wake up soon's the atmosphere starts goin' up, an' eat its way plumb through this half-burned stuff."

They trailed eastward, numbed by the torture of weariness like unsensitized turtles. The ground was covered with a network of half-burned trees; the limbs, gnawed off by the fire, carried lancelike points that ripped at their clothes and flesh. The peat sod of the dry swamp had been caverned beneath, and often a leg went through to the knee, bringing its owner down beneath his big pack.

In the afternoon they knew that Meekins' forecast was true; the greater fire was now sweeping over the partly burned forest. The wind had swung around to the west and was driving it. The race against death was still on.

"She's warmin' up," Peloo declared.

There was the disturbance of a hurricane in the air, volumes of gas, rolled into huge balloons, burst with the ripping noise of thunder when reached by a skyward shoot of flame from some tall pine. The fire was more terrific in its grandeur, more insatiate in its appetite, gulping into its maw the green trees of health as well as the dry trees of death. For hours they struggled in sullen desperation. Once Meekins stopped, and, looking about in a bewildered way, growled: "We're lost. I've missed

that ditch of stinkin' water. I seem to be goin' round an' round; there ain't nothin' to go by—nothin'. I look at the compass an' I see a whole bunch of needles playin' tag. My eyes is on fire."

"What we want is some place where there ain't nothin' to burn; forget the points of the compass!" Peloo growled.

Suddenly Trout whirled and searched with his eyes the back trail. Then he groaned: "Oh, Lord, we ain't so lost that cuss can't find us; there comes Baldy!"

Meekins took off his hat and rumpled his shock of hair, saying dejectedly: "It's him."

"Hello! You fellers lost again?" Slack hailed blithely as he approached.

"Not so's our friends can't find us," Peloo retorted. "Where d'you come from last?"

"I been in that ha'nted lake all night; I got caught between these two fires. I picked up your trail where you crawled out like muskrats this morning'."

"Was there anythin' you was wantin'?" Peloo asked innocently.

"Sure. I want to know if this gent is goin' to pay me for 'em things I cached back there an' is now burned up?"

"Mr. St. John ain't no insurance comp'ny, Baldy," Peloo retorted.

Before Slack could restate his claim Meekins interrupted: "We got to get along; this is playin'

the dang fool. Can you find that ghost mine—the rocks with the cave, Baldy?"

"I was headin' for there same's you was till you lost the salt creek at that place where it runs underground for two hundred yards. Then I knew you was lost again an' followed to save your dang necks."

"Come on, then," and Meekins slung his pack.

Following Slack, they picked up the small stream again, and in an hour they could see a big, white-gleaming rock. As they worked their way closer, Meekins discovered the big lone pine which the map showed as standing on the rock near the cave.

Keeping to the woods, they circled the rock till they came opposite this tree; then they could see in a cliff in the rock the black opening of the cave. Evidently it had been well hidden before the fire by a thick growth of bushes which were now destroyed.

"Hold on, Baldy!" Meekins said, putting a detaining hand on Slack's arm. "We got to do some figgerin' before we sail up to that door." He turned to Peloo. "I'm afeared there ain't no chance that Felix got burned to death."

"No; he'll be up in that cubby-hole waitin' with a mottor over the door, 'Welcome to our happy home;' he knows we're headin' this way," Peloo declared.

"There ain't no use givin' him a chance to shoot two or three, an' we got to get in there or get burned to death. I'm goin' to take the gun an'

crawl along by that wall an' make a quick dash for the cave. If I come out an' wave my hat, you'll know he ain't there, or I've pinned him."

"That's pretty risky, Red," Peloo objected.

"Oh, I don't think he's in there," Red declared carelessly.

"You're some liar, sorrel top. You're pretty sure he's there; so am I. But you ain't goin' to hog the game by gettin' first chance at him; you'll just draw lots with me as to who yanks him out." Peloo adjusted two little sticks between his fingers and proffered his hand to Meekins, saying: "Short stick interviews Felix."

Meekins, drew, and Peloo, handing him the remaining stick, said: "You win, but be danged careful."

Baldy, who had been eyeing this performance with a disgruntled look, asked: "Is it that yeller feller I see on the log back there?"

"That's the cuss," Peloo answered.

"An' he's got it in for you fellers?"

"He has."

"Then you can't beat that feller out; he'll pot you sure's God made little apples."

"What would you suggest, Baldy; wait here an' get burned up?" Peloo asked sarcastically.

"That feller ain't got nothin' 'gainst me; I ain't afeared of him." Slack pointed to a corner in the rock just beyond the cave mouth where the cliff fell away. "You two fellers take a wide circle back in the bush, an' work up to that place," he said.

"Nobody can see you from the cave. I'll go straight up from here, same's if I was alone an' gettin' away from the fire. He won't shoot me; he'll be glad of comp'ny. Soon's I'm inside I'll grab him if he's there, an' you fellers come in on the run."

Peloo looked at Slack, surprised admiration in his eyes, and held out his hand. "That's pretty decent, Baldy. Shake!

Peloo's emotion affected Slack. He replied: "I ought to get paid for 'em things I cached."

Trout point to St. John, who was sitting on a log fast asleep, and laughed.

Slack's plan was so reasonable that Meekins accepted it. From where they were in the woods they felt sure that no one in the cave could see them.

Waking St. John and telling him to remain just where he was with all their packs, Meekins and Trout, with a wide detour, circled the cliff. Slack, meanwhile, to draw the attention of Felix, made his way slowly and openly toward the cave. Peloo and Meekins were in position, Red with his rifle ready, not ten feet from the cave mouth, when Baldy made a quick dash into it.

A cry and a wild turmoil within caused the two watchers to dash for the entrance. As they reached it they were swept off their feet by a living torrent—a rushing black thing that grunted like a pig shot between Trout's legs, bringing him down. Peloo grabbed with both hands the soft fur of his as-

sailant, and, face to tail, he was carried off at a galloping rate toward the bush.

Baldy, part of the flood, had lighted on his head among some boulders.

Meekins scrambled to his feet, rubbing a leg, and darted into the cave.

Peloo, who had been dismounted, came limping back, exclaiming: "You seem kind of fond of gettin' mixed up with bears, Baldy."

Meekins now appeared. "There ain't no sign of Felix. You an' Baldy bring Mr. St. John an' the packs, an' I'll keep guard till you come."

When they had returned with the Englishman and entered the cave they found themselves in a chamber with a rounded dome, about fifteen feet in diameter. From this two dark drifts led away into the beyond, through one of which the bitter water flowed.

"I like 'em bears bein' in here," Meekins commented.

"I don't," Peloo declared.

"I mean," Meekins added, "that it looks 's if they hadn't been disturbed before—as if Felix hadn' come."

"We can't stay here," Peloo offered. "We'd smother from the gas when that big fire sweeps across, an' she's not far back, neither."

"There's lots more caves back there," Baldy advised.

"How d'you know—you been here before?" Meekins asked.

"It don't make no dif'rence how I know if there is caves," Baldy answered surlily.

Meekins saying, "Come on, let's explore," started down the passage of the running water, a candle which he had lighted in his hand.

They passed two crosscut passages, and then came to a chamber that was quite twenty feet in diameter. The rock floor was dry, lying a foot above the stream of bitter water. There was a round dome roof to this twenty feet high; in the centre of this roof, through a chink, the light entered, showing what had evidently been the square opening of a shaft.

"I guess we'd best camp here," Meekins advised. "We can get some ventilation, an' we can pot Felix if he tries to sneak in on us through that passage."

"We'll be safe here," Peloo confirmed. "The fire'll sweep overhead, an' 'bout to-morrow we can start back to tell the little priest that somebody gutted his gold mine."

"What?" ejaculated St. John.

"Yes," Meekins advised, "Peloo's right. These caves've been worked out right enough." Red was picking with his knife at a soft stringer in the wall. He held some of the débris in his palm, and by the light of the candle St. John could see the yellow gleam of gold. "These caves've been what's called kidneys of gold, loose schists, an' they've just shovelled it out—somebody."

"Not Felix surely?" St. John cried.

"No, it's been done before his time. An' now

I can't understand why there was any killin' if there was no gold."

"The whole the'ry falls to pieces, Red; it's got me guessin'," Peloo declared dolefully.

"Well, we'll just make ourselves as comfortable here as we can; we can open our packs, spread our blankets, and have somethin' to eat."

"Talkin' of eatin'," Peloo said from the far side of the cave; "somebody's been camped here right enough. Here's a nice tidy pile of dry poplar wood. We'll start a fire an' have a pot of tea. Gad, we ain't got no fresh water!" he added suddenly. "An' my advice to any one is not to go outside any more'n he can help."

"There'll be plenty of seepage water comin' through the rocks down that passage," Red declared. "You go get some, Grasshead."

But the Indian shook his head. "Me no go. Bad medicine. Plenty dead men down there!"

Meekins picked up a pail. "You old squaw!" he exclaimed. "There ain't nothin' there but holes in the rock."

"The Injun's right," Baldy contended; "there's a roomful of dead men packed away somewhere in this mine."

Meekins, carrying the pail, disappeared in the darkness of the drift on his quest for water. Peloo started a fire, and, taking out the fry pan, proceeded to slice bacon.

St. John, dead tired, spread his blankets and lay down. Slack was puffing moodily at his pipe.

For five minutes no one spoke, the silence only disturbed by the sputtering of fat in the fry pan and the scrape of a knife as Peloo turned the bacon.

Suddenly, with a roar, the whole rock island they had found seemed to rise up and fall back with a crash as of splindered glass. A shaft of stifling gas drove in from the tunnel and prostrated them like tenpins. Gasping for breath, choking, almost smothered, they struggled to their feet, the horror of a new catastrophe in their eyes.

"What is it?" St. John panted, but Peloo, stunned by the awful surmise that was in his mind, did not answer.

Meekins came rushing to the chamber, splashing through the water. When he saw the others still alive he gasped: "Thank God! When I heard that I thought Peloo's fire had somehow got to the dynamite in my pack. I expected to find you all blowed to pieces."

He drew his hand across his eyes as if to shut out his vision; he was trembling. Then he jumped into the running water, and disappeared down the drift they had come in by.

Presently he returned, and, sitting down as if exhausted, said brokenly: "We're trapped! That cursed breed has blowed in the passage!"

The horror of the situation flashed into the minds of every one. Trapped!

"That devil," Meekins continued, "had this game in his mind when he stole that dynamite from your pack, mister.

The Englishman started; he had not known of this, but he remained silent.

"He had two ways of baggin' us," Peloo said. "Nothin' small 'bout him. Get us all at once; set the whole north country afire to burn us, or, if that fell down, hide here in some of these crosscuts till we was all in here, an' then blow in the hallway."

"That's what I get for helpin' you fellers out," Slack commented bitterly.

"Can't we get out?" St. John asked. "Surely there must be another passage."

"I ain't never been in no tight corner I couldn't squeeze out of, mister. We'll be out of here tomorrow."

Peloo searched Red's face, but the latter turned his eyes sullenly away.

A scraping noise above their heads caused them to look upward. Two of the small logs covering the opening were thrust to one side, and the evil face of Felix appeared in the opening.

"You all ver' comf'able, m'sieus? You fin' de gol' mine, eh? P'r'aps you fin' another dead man. Ha-ha!" The sneering voice was fiendish.

"You surely don't mean to murder men in cold blood in this cowardly way?" St. John expostulated.

"Dat's not murder; you go in you'self. *Nom du chien!*"

Baldy stood in the shadow. No one noticed that he held his light Marlin rifle behind his back. "You

let me out!" he commanded. "You ain't got nothin' 'gainst me."

"By gar, dere's de smart man! You t'ink I don' know you're wit' dese men when you come walk by you'self to de cave, eh? You smart man, M'sieu Loony Baldy!"

The taunt roused Slack to fury. Felix saw the gun swung to the hip, and dodged just as the red flash spurted from its barrel.

There was a silence. Felix had either been killed or had gone; there was only the droning howl of the forest fire.

"I hope you shot him, Baldy," Peloo said after a little. "I'd hate to know that devil got away after this."

"Felix won't get away," Meekins declared. "He committed suicide when he blowed in that passage."

Nobody asked any explanation of this. The danger of their own position loomed larger than Felix's possible fate.

"Well, let's eat this grub an' then find some way of gettin' out," Peloo suggested.

When they had eaten, Meekins said: "Me an' Peloo'll hunt some way of gettin' out, an', Baldy, you an' Mr. St. John can wait here. There must be some air shaft somewhere back in these workin's."

The two men, floundering and slipping on the slimy stones that lay in the water in the bed of the drift, found a perfect network of drifts and crosscuts leading to and out of cavelike chambers, the

latter all showing that a fabulous quantity of gold schists had been taken out, by whom or when it was impossible to conjecture.

As they sat in a large chamber that was the end of a crosscut they had followed, Meekins said: "I guess there ain't no air shaft, Peloo; these fellers that gutted this didn't need it." He pointed to the roof of the cave; smoke was sifting down through a fissure three inches wide. "They got ventilation through these cracks an' the mouth of the tunnel."

"I guess Felix knowed all that when he blowed us in."

After they had rested, they once more took up their pilgrimage. As they followed a small passage, the roof of which was so low that they were forced to crouch, suddenly Meekins sprang back with a cry of pain; he put his hand to his cheek, and when he withdrew it it was covered with blood. A sweep of the candle, a minute examination of something that projected at a sharp angle from the roof, and Meekins leaned against the wall and laughed.

Peloo looked compassionately at him. "I guess you're kind of tuckered out, Red, an' that nasty jab's upset you, ain't it?"

"Do you know where we are?" Meekins queried.

"I ain't sure, but I kind of think we're in jail."

"We're on Felix's mine. An' that's the steel bar you drove down through the crack in the test pit I sunk."

This astounding discovery held Peloo to silence,

and Meekins added: "A couple of fingers of dynamite'll rip the bottom out of that pit, an' we can get out. We'll leave the bar here so's we can't miss the place, an' leave some signs as we trail back, an' when the fire's blowed over we'll turn the trick."

When they had returned to their companions, Meekins explained that they would stay there all night, and that they could easily get out in the morning.

"That takes one load off our minds," St. John said, "but I can't get over the horror of that fiend's work. And his ghoulish cackle about another body—I'm afraid it's—that we—that is, that he murdered the other here."

Speaking to Meekins, Peloo said: "I guess the pinto man got Lord Happy, poor fellow!"

Opening his eyes that had been closed in a tired doze, Slack turned to Peloo. "Did you say somethin' about Lord Happy?"

"Did you know him—do you know anything about him?" Trout queried.

"Did I know him? Say, that *was* a loony cuss, if you like!" Peloo kicked Slack in the leg, but he only pulled his limb away, growling: "Keep your dang hoofs off a feller, Peloo!"

St. John looked up eagerly. "You knew Lord Happy, Slack?"

"He give me that gold nugget I showed you fellers," Baldy answered.

"Didn't some one else give it to you, too, Baldy? First it was Muskwa, now it's Lord Happy. I

guess to be a good liar a feller's got to have a good mem'ry," Peloo remarked angrily.

Slack flared up. "I don't have to tell strangers just where I get things—not when they ask questions they ain' got no bus'ness to ask." Then he lapsed into moody silence.

But he softened under St. John's patient voice saying: "Play the game, Slack; we're really interested in Lord Happy."

"You fellers come over Moose Crossin', didn't you?" Baldy asked gruffly.

"Yes," St. John declared.

"Well, about three months ago I pulled through that crick, an' this side I finds a feller that's all in. Say, his backbone was stickin' out in front; he hadn't any belly. I guess it took me 'bout two days boilin' deer meat into broth, an' lettin' him suck a little of it down at a time till I got him so's he could wiggle his finger. When his tongue got so's it could stand alone—say! Peloo there can gab, but that feller had him skinned to death."

"You two was well hooked up, then?" Peloo growled.

"I'll give you the story he spun. How much of it was right, an' how much he dreamed while he was out of his senses through starvin', I don't know. He said him an' this Felix went to stake a gold mine they knowed of, an' they found another feller on the job. From what I see now I guess it was this same old worked-out mine. They all agreed to stake it together—pardners. Then they found out it wasn't

no good. I guess they got in here. Felix wanted to go out an' sell it on the top showin' of gold an' say nothin' 'bout this cave, 'cause it was pretty hard to find. Lord Happy claims he wouldn't fall for this crooked game, an' when he was asleep Felix hit him over the head with a club an' lit out at night with all their grub an' a bag of gold nuggets they'd picked up. The other feller—Barnes was his name—got Lord Happy conscious in the morning, but he's pretty sick.

"They start after Felix, for it seems there's a canoe at Moose Crossing that he's goin' to get out with. About a couple of miles from Moose River, Happy plays out; his head's bad. Barnes takes the gun an' pushes on after Felix. Lord Happy gets to Moose Crossin' next day, but the other feller is gone. He waits there, thinkin' p'r'aps Barnes'll come back, or his Injun, Muskwa, hasn't turned up yet with the canoe. He don't know much after that till I find him. He didn't even have a coat; lost it."

"An' poor Barnes was lying there, murdered, all the time, not fifty yards away," Peloo said.

"How long were you at the Crossin' after you found Lord Happy?" Meekins queried.

"Three days; then we made a short trail, for that feller was pretty weak."

"It was after Slack left that Muskwa turned up," Meekins explained to St. John.

"Lord Happy didn't die, then?" St. John asked eagerly.

"Die? I should say not! He fed up, an' in

'bout two weeks he was sayin' the whole thing was a dang-good joke on him; he guessed he'd never get over bein' a tenderfoot. He stayed with me for 'bout a month, then McLeod an' some fellers come along prospectin', an' he went off with 'em."

St. John stood up, and, holding out his hand to Baldy, said: "You saved the life of a relative of mine, Slack."

"That wasn't much; I wasn't very busy just then. I ought to get paid for 'em goods that was burned up in the cache, though," and Slack fixed his green-gray eyes on St. John compellingly.

The Englishman laughed, "You'll get that several times over," he declared.

Slack's story completed the explanation of Felix's actions. As he had failed to keep them from discovering his crime and the worthlessness of the mine, he had sought to destroy them all.

That night was a fight against the deadly carbonic-gas fumes that drove through the opening in the roof of their cave, but in the morning they judged that the full fury of the fire had passed over.

Meekins blew out the bottom of the test pit, and they soon stood on the fire-swept mound of rock. A heavy rain was putting out what was left of the fire.

Meekins led them to the mouth of the cave, saying: "Felix didn't have no other place to crawl into but this; he didn't know that the gas would smother him. I think you'll find him in there."

Baldy sprang forward. "If he's dead I want to

see him." When Slack came out he said: "He's there."

"I guess we'll cover him up with a big heap of stones," Meekins said; "he don' even deserve that."

"Then we'll get back an' tell Father Perdue that his mine ain't no good," Peloo added.

Meekins turned to the Englishman, saying apologetically: "I guess you're out your expenses this trip. I'm sorry that the thing ain't no good. If I could've done better——"

St. John interrupted: "By Jove, you saved me buying a bad mine, and between us we've bagged the swindler and murderer. Better still, my dear fellow," and he put his hand on Meekins's arm, "I'd rather find Lord Happy alive than a cave full of gold."

II

WILD OATS

Red Meekins had his collection of antique silver hidden under a large boulder of conglomerate rock half a mile from the Silver Ledge shafthouse. When even the professors of geology and mineralogy had disputed with heat the age of these samples of ancient art, Red had troubled little over the matter, being more largely interested in the subtle endeavour of acquiring his contorted slabs of pure silver quietly and the equally difficult business of finding a secretive purchaser.

In short, Red was "high grading," assimilating the precious metal from the sorting board of his employers, the Silver Ledge Company.

This high grading was a peculiarly fine point in the ethics of stealing; it was looked upon as something akin to beating the customs. Meekins found a touch of exhilaration in outwitting the company's two detectives. The detectives worked as ordinary miners; they slept in the one big room of the bunkhouse, which contained thirty beds; they ate at the table with the men, and fancied that they were unsuspected; but Red knew. A massive-jawed fighting bulldog was turned loose nightly in the ore-house to guard the sacks of high grade ore; but Red

Meekins rubbed shoulders with the two detectives as fellow workmen, shied a rock at the bulldog if he saw him nosing about alone, and went on high grading.

It was a species of woodsman's instinct, something akin to a sixth sense, that told Meekins somebody had found his cache of silver under the big rock. For two sweet moonlight nights he watched Farren and Riley, the detectives, as they sat in vigil near his cache waiting to pounce upon the unknown depositor. On the third night dark clouds smothered the moon, and Meekins took his little bag of ore from under the very noses of the watchers and hid it in a badger hole a mile away.

In the way of establishing an alibi should his absence from the bunkhouse cause an inquiry, Meekins, after he had hidden the silver, called at the log shack of Jack Gray, owner of the Little Star mining claim.

"How's she showin' up?" Red asked as he took a seat on Gray's bunk. "How's the vein lookin'?"

"Not too bad," Gray answered, with the conservative caution of an oldtime prospector.

"I heerd you shootin' to-day," Meekins offered. "Hope you ripped up a silver sidewalk—you had calcite enough before."

Gray ignored the matter of silver sidewalks and passed the speaker a plug of tobacco, saying, "Fill your pipe, Red."

Red lighted the pipe and drew at it with tantalizing deliberation. He was thinking. Evidently

Gray's shot had discovered no bonanza; his whole manner held the sombreness of defeat. Meekins finally hazarded, "I heerd you'd sold the Little Star, Jack."

"Well," Gray answered, shuffling about the shack as he spoke, "I've sold it, an' I ain't. Two hundred thousand if the vein shows native silver; that's the bargain, Red. Mr. Downs was to come to-morrow to look at the vein."

"An' the mineral, Jack, got it?"

"Well, we're hopin'. She looks good to me."

"He ain't got it yet," Meekins muttered to himself. And somehow a thought of his own little silver horde came tangently into his mind like a correlative factor. Here was a trinity of holdings that, concreted into one, would certainly be advantageous.

"Say," he ejaculated as he fussed at the pipe bowl with his knife, loosening the tobacco, "I'd like to see you soak that Englishman that's bluffin' round here 'bout buyin' a mine. A mine! It's a pup Bank of England that Bloater Bangs wants."

"Boultbee Downs is the gent's name, Red; you've got his handle sorter twisted," Gray advised.

"His name don't cut no ice, Jack; he's a porky little stiff! I meets him kinder offhand like at the Nugget Hotel last night an' makes a play to boost the Little Star for you, Jack, an' what d'you think Bolster & Co. hands out to me?"

Gray chuckled. "Said he hadn't been introduced; gave you the wall eye an' cut away, eh?"

"Kinder like that, Jack, only wuss, more cold blooded. Says he, takin' a silver cigarette case from his pocket an' lightin' one of 'em coffin nails, 'I have in my service an engineer quite competent to advise me of the desirability of such properties as I wish to purchase.' Holy Snakes! Could you beat it?"

Gray chuckled again; then his face relaxed into its habitual solemnity. "English is no dub, Red; he knows what o'clock it is. He's got the coin at his back, an' I'd like to sell him the Little Star for two hundred thousand. I don't know nothin' about floatin' a company—an' God knows some of the veins about here is as lean as a razorback hog! The Little Star has got mighty good indications of silver; but—" Gray walked over to a cupboard, swung the door open, brought a black bottle forth by the neck, and, handing a glass to Meekins, added, "By the hokey! if I clean up this time, farmin' for mine! No more minin', never no more again!"

Meekins laughed disagreeably.

"Heerd a man talk like that afore, eh, Red?" Gray growled sarcastically.

"Sorter that way; but they gener'lly held a better hand."

"You ain't seen none of my cards. What d'you know about the Little Star?" Gray snapped.

"Nothin', nothin'. Jus' kinder mind readin', that's all.

Gray vouchsafed no answer to this sally; but stood looking, a suspicion of sullen anger in his heavy eyes, at Meekins. After a little he spoke.

"If you're good at mind readin', p'r'aps you could tell the fortune of the Little Star, whether there's a big vein like the Lawson or the Crown Reserve in her."

"I can tell you how to put that Cockney's two hundred thousand in your pocket, if you want to know," Meekins answered.

"Tellin' is one thing, an' figurin' the dollars is another."

"You ripped up the vein to-day, didn't you, Jack?" Meekins asked.

"I opened her up some."

"An' you didn't find nothin' but calcite, with p'r'aps a few colours of cobalt; ain't that right, Jack?"

"S'posin' it is, that ain't your business, Red! You didn't grubstake me, did you?"

Meekins ignored the irrelevant aftermath. "Well, when Johnny Bull cocks his one-eyed winder at that hole, he don't buy; he just says, 'Ah, by Jove! Not quite up to the mark, me dear feller,' an' skins back to the hotel for a bath." Meekins grinned as he heard Gray cursing under his breath. "But if he sees some nice fat chunks of silver there, then he 'diplomatically opens negotiations,' don't he?—that's the way he puts it,—an' it ends by you gettin' the dough."

"An' if in the mornin' I get a letter sayin' an aunt's left me a million dollars, Red, I'll buy you a bottle of whisky an' a monkey on a stick, an' you can have a high old time. See?"

"Now what I propose," Meekins shoved both hands into his pockets in utter contempt of Gray's misplaced humour, "is to let the gent from Londonderry see enough silver to knock that glass plumb out of his eye."

Gray stared in astonishment at Meekins. "He's only had one drink," he muttered; then he added aloud, in heavy sarcasm, "That's a good idea, Red. You can come over in the mornin', turn this forty acres upside down, an' just let the silver spill out. I'll give you ten per cent. Kinder wish I'd talked this over with you afore."

"I'll take the ten per cent.," Meekins offered in fee simple for the whole statement; "an' as to how, it's this wise. We just fill that calcite vein up with cement an' gravel carryin' about three thousand ounces of silver to the ton, an' on the day as specified by Johnny Bull you put in a shot an' loosen her up. There can't be no deception, gentlemen, 'cause you have your sleeves rolled up. See?"

Gray leaned back in his chair and laughed. "Meekins, you've got a great head—for hammerin' a drill. You oughter've been a revivalist, 'cause the people don't ask too many questions in that perfession. What d'you s'pose they'd say when they know I'd been round buyin' cement an' pieces of silver to stick in a vein, eh?"

"I got the silver right enough," Meekins said quietly; "got her cached within ten minutes totin' of this spot. An' I'll jus' borrow the cement from the Silver Ledge. They're puttin' in a new engine bed

on vein fourteen, an' there's tons of cement lyin' round there loose. All you've got to do is lend me a bag to bring the stuff. It wouldn't do to hook a full bag, 'cause they're all tallied up."

Red's cold blooded scheme of knavery was like a heavy body blow to Gray. He sat for a long time pulling at his pipe; the pop-pop of his lips as he shot forth the smoke crackled on the heavy silence of the room like the bursting of horse chestnuts in a fire of leaves. Through twenty years of scorching heat and blizzard cold he had sought the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow. Twice he had touched the hem of the purple robe of wealth and had been well kicked in the ribs by the foot of adversity hidden beneath. At that very link in his chain of thought he worded this somewhat more prosaically for Meekins, "I got a raw deal twice in my life, Red—"

"I know," Meekins interrupted. "When Hardy beat you out of the Golden Oriole."

"Yes, that was 'bout the only time I was chuck full of murder. I'd 've killed Hardy if he hadn't skun out, I'd 've ripped him up like an ol' rubber boot! Then I sold the One Horse mine to a bunch from Pittsburgh— But what's the use of talkin'? It makes me dead sore! I never got nothin' out of it 'cept the first payment."

"Well, you got yer chance to break more than even with the game now."

"I don't call it gettin' even to turn crook just because you've been bunkoed yerself," Gray argued.

There was a lack of fire in his tone that Meekins caught; there was a dragging intonation as if the speaker was uttering an abstract thought with his mind dwelling on something more impressive.

"Bein' a crook is gettin' caught, I figger," Meekins declared doggedly. "You've heerd, an' I've heerd, of a good many deals up in this field, an' the whole boilin' of lawyers an' Gov'men legal department is jus' up to their armpits tryin' to give somebody some kind of a square deal. Minin's kinder like swimmin',—you leave your Sunday clo'es to home when you go at it."

"That's right enough, Red; but I don't lose no sleep 'cause the other feller's crooked."

"No; an' they don't lose no sleep if you ain't got a nickel in your pocket. The gent as gets your mine for two hundred thousand will soak the public with it as a million-dollar company—or perhaps five."

Gray sat sullenly silent, a heavy frown on his face, and Meekins asked abruptly, "Ain't the Little Star no good, Jack? It's close up to the Silver Ledge, an' the veins there is packed like herrin's in a bar'l."

"Why, it's sure got to turn out a good mine," Gray answered; "but a feller can't cross trench forty acres of land in a month, an' I jus' ain't dropped onto no big vein yet."

"Then don't be a fool!" Meekins advised. "You ain't cheatin' nobody by lettin' 'em have the Little Star at two hundred thousand; only if you had that money in the bank I guess you an' the wife'd

feel you could afford a little holiday an' be set up for life."

Gray rose and paced the floor. In an aimless manner he wandered to the cupboard and brought forth the black bottle again. Meekins was considerable of a drinker himself; but he gasped as Gray tossed off half a tumbler of the raw whisky.

"That'll brace you, Jack," he ventured. "You've got yer chance right now to make yer pile. I'll bet you've swore a dozen times, since you've been minin' an' seen all the crooked work that's bein' done, that if you ever got a chance to make a big stake you'd make it! Didn't you, Jack?"

"Yes, I've got hot under the collar when I knowed the fellers was playin' me fer a sucker when I got done up; but I ain't never lied about a mine yet. Them's two things I never shot off hot air about yet, a woman or a mine."

"Course you didn't, Jack. An' you'll go on jus' that way, an' the fellers as makes the pile'll give you a job when you're old sortin' ore on the dump. An' as for lyin', you ain't got to do none. I'll fix up that vein, an' when Bleater-Down comes here to see there ain't no deception, you put the shot in an' let him take the samples of ore away to get an assay. When his assay man hands him out two or three big buttons of silver he'll be that sure he's cheatin' you in gettin' the Little Star at that price, he won't sleep till he's got you to accept a check."

Meekins rose in his eagerness and put his hand on Gray's arm, saying, "Get me a grain bag out of

your stable, Jack. I'm dashed if I don't work all night pluggin' that vein! Two hundred thousand dollars ain't made every night. Now, don't get grouchy, Jack," he coaxed, as Gray drew his arm away; "you've got a chance at two hundred thousand sure, an' if you turn it down p'r'aps your claim'll peter out same's the Lone Pine claim did. It broke ol' Saunders, broke his pockets an' broke his heart. Ain't he now in the asylum diggin' little ditches in a wooden table with a pocketknife, swearin' he's got the biggest silver mine in the world? He could've sold for half a million, an' wouldn't."

Rugged and strong as Gray appeared, yet there was pliability to his moral fibre. In the lesser matter of taking a drink—too many drinks—he had always yielded to the friendly "Come on, Jack, old boy!" Hardly acquiescing in the scheme, still rebelling weakly against it, Gray yielded to the pressure of Red's hand on his arm, and the two went out to a little log stable that held Gray's hoisting gear, the bucket horse.

"Here's an empty!" Meekins exclaimed, as he peered about by the light of his miner's candle. "I'll take this bag an' get busy, Jack. I'll be back in an hour." Suddenly a thought struck him. "Say, where's the two fellers that works on the vein?"

"They're boardin' over to McCann's bunkhouse."

"Well, you give 'em a day off to-morrow. Say the ol' hoss's sick an' can't hoist none. Keep 'em

away from the vein till the cement gets sot good an' hard. Now I'm off!"

Meekins turned at the door and, scanning Gray's face, asked, "D'you want to put a hand to this job? 'Cause if you don't I can do it alone."

"There ain't no call for you to do it alone, Red. I don't see no difference 'tween helpin' an' knowin' it's done. Guess I never was learned in them fine points of lyin'. I'll help salt the mine,—'cause that's what it is, Red,—and if the Englishman gets wise to it an' asks me, I won't hand him out no fairy tale; I'll just get riled an' buffalo him off the forty acres by the seat of his pants. I feel sorter mad at myself now."

"You ain't weakenin', Jack?"

"No, I ain't weakenin'. It's a kind of disease I never get. I've been bunkoed, an' made use of by fellers with money for more'n twenty years, an' I'm goin' to see this through. P'r'aps I can sorter square it by doin' more good with that money—if I get it—than them rich promoters. I know a slue of poor people down in my county that'll throw a powerful lot of prayers after I've done with 'em. I've jus' been itchin' to help some of 'em out!"

Meekins stood for a second scratching the tangled mop of red bristling hair; then he said, "Takin' one thing with another, Jack, I figger I'd best do this job all by myself."

"I don't want to shirk——"

"Shirk nothin'! I wasn't nursin' your feelin's, Jack; but that silver I've got is dead set again'

lettin' anybody see it, an' as long as nobody's got to swear in court they see me with it, why I've got a good alibi, haven't I, if the Silver Ledge people gits on my trail? You jus' go by-by in your little bed, Jack, an' in the mornin' you'll find that tear in the vein all nice healed up."

Then Meekins slipped into the scant forest of birch and poplar and his shadow was soon merged with its gloom.

Gray went back to his shack and the toiler's sleep, and from the storehouse of his mind stalked forth grim entanglements. One time he was lying helpless while Meekins, with sardonic deliberation, incased him in a fast solidifying sarcophagus of cement. Again he was throwing a shower of silver coins to a rabble of starvelings. All night his dreams, with chameleon-like affiliation, draped their hideous forms in the drab of guilt. Yes, all night he dreamed; for at dawn with a mighty effort he swept aside the avalanche of banknotes that, a foot deep, were smothering him, and sprang to the floor, his blanket still in his trembling grasp.

Then he dressed and went down to the little pit, six feet deep, that had been sunk on the vein. Where yesterday the jagged gash left by the dynamite shot had disfigured the bottom of the pit now a smooth dull gray surface met his eye. Meekins had done a neat job of concrete work.

Gray threw a shovelful of loose sand down to cover the evidence of Red's handicraft and took his

way to McCann's to tell his men there would be no work for that day.

"Now for Boultbee Downs of London!" Gray muttered.

A telephone message from the office of the Black Rock mine, giving the sick horse excuse, brought much imperious expostulation from Boultbee Downs, and the latter's visit of inspection was postponed for two days.

On the second day Boultbee Downs, with an engineer and a secretary, drove over to the Little Star. He was rotund of body and manner. As Red Meekins had described him, he seemed to think the Lord had built a straight-away chute through the world for him with all rights preserved.

"I've been trenchin' for a couple of days," Gray explained, "tryin' to see how far the mineralized vein I picked up ran."

"Ah, my dear fellow!" Boultbee Downs condescended. "By 'mineralized' just what do you mean, now? There's cobalt, and nickel, and smaltite, and a tremendous lot of other 'ites, while all I'm interested in is silver. Now, definitely speaking, Mr. —ah—Gray, will you be good enough to inform Mr. Forsythe here just what you found?"

"Well," Gray answered slowly, "I kinder thought it'd be a good idee for you to see the shot put in, and——"

Boultbee Downs interrupted fussily. "Sample the veins ourselves, eh, Gray? Seems deuced fair, Forsythe, eh?"

"Yes, sir," the engineer answered deferentially.

"I say, Forsythe, by Jove! Quite an innovation finding one of these mining fellows wanting to play the game fair!"

"I drilled a hole," Gray advised, "and I'll have Jorgsen put the dynamite in."

"Quite right, quite right," Downs declared. "Expeditiously, of course, for I have a stupendous number of things to attend to."

Just as the charge was rammed home, the fuse lighted, and the men were scuttling to places of safety, Red Meekins drifted casually on the scene.

"Thought I'd kinder like to see the fun," he said as he crouched behind a rock with Gray. "I want to see that Cheapside chap bulge his eyes just for onct when he cuddles one of my nuggets. I'll bet he tells you the vein doesn't run more'n two hundred ounces to the ton, an' tries to beat you down to a hundred thousand. There she goes!" he exclaimed as the earth trembled under their feet and an explosive roar heralded a shower of rock debris. "I strung the silver pretty well along," Red whispered as they went toward the shaft. "Hope it didn't get mislaid, none of it."

It was Boultbee Downs himself who picked up a slab of silver the size of his own fat palm, to the side of which clung a piece of Red's conglomerate. Meekins saw him pick it up; but turned his back quickly, and Downs, without comment, passed it to Forsythe, who dropped the metal into his leather

bag. In the rent the shot had made from two or three places undoubtedly silver protruded.

"Yes," Gray said in answer to a question from Downs, "I got a couple of pieces of silver farder on in the vein an' thought it looked pretty good."

Downs exhibited a tremendous anxiety to get away, also to carry with him as many fragments of conglomerate as might be had. An ore sack that was in his buggy was filled. Quite casually, just as he was about to step into his conveyance, he turned to Gray and said:

"Ah, Mr. Gray, I'm a man of business—yes, sir, of what I might term definite business arrangements. We have found—haven't we, Mr. Forsythe?" he appealed to the engineer—"that bargains in this mining region are like piecrust, made to be broken. Ha-ha! And we waste a great deal of valuable time through having deals repudiated. My secretary, Mr. Smythe, has a little form of sale which you might sign. It simply gives me an option on your mine for forty-eight hours. I may say that in the event of the assay of these samples being satisfactory I shall close the deal at once. Now what figure shall we say, Mr. Gray, twenty thousand pounds?"

Gray felt Meekins kick him in the calf of the leg, and he answered, "Two hundred thousand dollars is what I said I'd sell for; but if that don't go the price of the Little Star is boosted to half a million now."

Boultbee Downs gasped, and hurriedly drawing a

pencil from his pocket inserted some figures, saying, "Ah, my dear fellow, you agreed to sell at two hundred thousand."

"An' I gen'rally keep my word," Gray asserted as he signed the paper.

"You'll hear from me within forty-eight hours," Boultbee Downs advised as he clambered into the buggy. "If the assay is satisfactory, I'll have the regular papers and a check waiting for you."

The two miners watched Downs till a turn in the road hid him.

"Somethin'll go wrong," Gray muttered, speaking as if to himself. "'Taint my luck to make a win like this."

"Hit yourself over the liver, Jack!" Red advised. "That shark thinks he's skinnin' you, an' he'll have the Little Star twinklin' in his shirt front afore tomorrow night. I near bust tryin' to keep from laughin' when I see him palm that chunk of silver. I took a day off from the work just to enjoy the show."

Meekins spent the day and evening with Gray. He had picked out a dozen investments for the twenty thousand he was to get out of the deal.

It was nearly ten o'clock, and he had just finished, to the minutest detail, a description of a dairy business he was going to start in his native town, when there came a sharp rap at the door.

"Say, what did I tell you, Jack?" Meekins whispered. "That's Bolter Jones, I bet a hundred. He just couldn't sleep till he closed the deal."

"Come in!" Gray called sharply.

As the door swung open Red gave an involuntary gasp of delight. It was the secretary, Smythe. He was a thin young man with straw coloured eyebrows. Employment with Boultbee Downs had negatived him into a proper suave humility.

"Mr. Gray?" he said tentatively.

"That's me," Gray answered.

The secretary drew from his pocket a large official envelope.

Meekins stretched his leg under the table and gently rubbed the toe of his boot up and down Gray's shin. It was surely a check for at least half of the two hundred thousand, Red whispered to himself.

"Mr. Boultbee Downs had me drive over to present this letter with his compliments to Mr. Gray," the secretary said. Then he put his hat on and turned to the door.

"Hadn't you best wait and see if there's—he might be wantin' an answer or somethin'," Gray suggested.

"Mr. Boultbee Downs advised me there would be no answer," Smythe replied, and melted away into the shadows of the night.

"Well, I'm dashed!" Gray ejaculated softly. "That's kinder queer!" He turned the envelope over in his hands, eyeing it apprehensively.

Meekins stretched a big hand which carried on its back a bristle of red hair, saying, "Let me see her, Jack!" Red held the envelope between his eyes and

the lamp. "Bet you five dollars there's a check in that, Jack! I can see a pinky end of somethin'," he said, handing the letter back to Gray.

"What was that straw coloured ink slinger in such a hurry to get away for, Red? Seems to me as though there's somethin' gone wrong."

"Wrong nothin'! Don't you understand! Bloater Brown was afeared you might want to call the deal off to his secretary—don't you see?—an' he'd be a sort of witness—an' me bein' here, too, to hear it. But he's served the check on you—it's like a summons. He didn't want to give you no chance to refuse the money. Oh, you're bound up to the sale now!"

"I hope you're right, Red; but danged if I don't sorter hate to open her up! I got a kinder feelin' that—— Well, it's just this way, I never did have no luck!"

"There couldn't nothin' go wrong," Red objected. "He ain't seen the mine since he took them nuggets away. He's just rushed the assay an' was afeared you'd find how rich it had panned out afore he closed the deal. Here's a knife. Slit her open an' see how big the check is. I never felt so sure of anything in my life."

"Well, here goes!" Gray drew a big breath, shoved the knife through an end of the envelope, and as he inserted his fingers added, "It sorter makes me creepy."

Red leaned far over the table, his brown eyes electric with excitement, as Gray drew forth a some-

what bulky fold of papers. "What did I say?" yelled Red. "There's the proper agreement an' all, I bet! Hello! What in thunder's this?" A small, neatly folded parcel had fallen from the papers in Gray's hand.

"P'r'aps that's a diamond pin present for you," Red opined as he picked it up. "But first see if there ain't a check there, an' what Bloater says."

Gray opened the papers and discovered the preliminary agreement he had signed earlier in the day.

"That's the old one back," Red advised. "He's got the new ones all drawed up. What does Bloater Jones say, Jack?"

Gray ran his eyes slowly down a typewritten letter, and Meekins saw his face turn to an ashy hue and his heavy lip stiffen to hard lines.

"What does he say, Jack? Old man, there ain't nothin' gone wrong? He ain't squealin', is he?"

"Gimme that little package, Red!"

Gray with trembling fingers opened the package, and Meekins saw nestling in the white paper half a dozen grains of discoloured oats.

"I don't understand, Jack!" he gasped. "What's it all about? What's that got to do with Bloater Brown an' your mine?"

Gray passed the letter to Meekins, and sat, his head hanging heavily on a limber neck, while Red perused the contents aloud. The letter explained that the assayer had found the samples of ore very rich in silver; the writer might add "suspiciously rich." He had also discovered, in the process of

pulverizing the ore, probably half a pint of oats. This curious blend of agricultural product with silver, hitherto unknown in mineralogy, had caused him to examine closely the conglomerate carrying the silver, and he had classed it as manufactured cement, mixed with loose gravel. These startling inconsistencies had induced Mr. Boultbee Downs to decline the purchase of the Little Star mine, and he was returning inclosed the preliminary agreement.

The letter fell from Red's hand. He sat staring helplessly at Gray.

The latter roused himself to say, "I knew I never could have no luck!"

"The oats was in the feed bag!" Red moaned. "Twenty thousand bucks! If I'd only had a clean bag!"

III

THE WEIGHT OF METAL

PETER WRIGHT was vainly searching for gold in British Columbia, Red Meekins absorbing booze in New Liskeard, and John Haskell making money in the village of Newgate; but within a month these three had come together in a search for silver in Cobalt.

Haskell met Wright on the train going east. There was a semblance of rugged honesty about the miner which impressed Haskell, and before they reached Toronto he had agreed to grubstake Peter in the Cobalt field.

Had Haskell submitted to his lawyer the agreement Peter provided, there would have been less turmoil over the Pink Eye; indeed, it might not have been discovered at all. The simplicity of this document seemed to preclude subtle unfairness. In it Wright covenanted to give Haskell a half interest in all mining claims he might stake in 1907, for a consideration of fifteen hundred dollars; five hundred down, and balance in two instalments. That was in June, and Peter went north to New Liskeard, where he hired Red Meekins to accompany him, and then continued on into the wilds.

Within two months he had located three mining

claims in Dufferin township, and wrote to Haskell encouragingly. As the Dufferin claims simply pop in and out of this story, having little to do with the Pink Eye, it would be well to skip all the depressing days of fruitless endeavour and take up with Red Meekins's vivid words as he and Peter sat in front of their little log shack one evening in September.

"There ain't no silver in this God-forsaken corner of the earth, Pete! It's a mooseyard, that's what it is!" Meekins growled. "If you'd pull out of this mosquito nest and trail with me to a lake forty miles west of Elk City, I'd show you somethin' that'd make your eyes bulge bigger'n a lobster's."

"I've heard talk like that before," Wright sneered. "The gold was always on the other side of the mountain, and, like a fool, at first I uster take stock in their yarns an' go jackrabbitin' round, an' all I got was corns."

"It's there, right enough," Red asserted doggedly. "I see a streak of it as big as a brick wall runnin' straight up a cliff thirty feet high."

"Why didn't you stake it?"

"'Cause I didn't know what it was them days—that was five years ago. I was guide for a Cockney Lord out shootin', an' hadn't never mined none till this Cobalt boom started. Soon's I've saved up a grubstake you bet I'll fly my kite to where that big silver chute is jus' standin' up on its hind legs an' beggin' some feller to come an' get rich!"

Peter laughed derisively.

"Jus' thought of somethin' funny, didn't you?" Red snapped.

"There ain't nothin' funny about minin'," Peter answered solemnly, "except that it's a good joke on the feller that goes in for it."

For a week Peter pondered over Red's yarn. He was like other oldtime miners, who, no matter how often they chase a will-o'-the-wisp, are ever ready to follow its illusive light. That is really what makes for discovery. At the end of the week Peter made a bargain with Red to grubstake a trip in search of silver. He put the matter of his contract with Haskell in the background—he would straighten that up somehow.

Red unconsciously worded the sentiment that was hardly yet a definite intent in Peter's mind. "Let the duck that staked you keep these claims for hisself—he's got enough money, anyway. Like as not he'd throw you down," he advised.

Red's words grated on Peter's ears. He would surely give Haskell some share of any great luck that might happen his way. It was a remote possibility, a safe salve for his conscience.

It took them two weeks to make the journey; first south to Latchford, and then up the Montreal River with its sixteen portages. With the very last rapid the two men had trouble, and the laughing waters took a toll of half their outfit.

"Here we are at last!" Red ejaculated triumphantly as they landed on the west shore of Gowganda Lake.

Though they were in verity there, Red's silver vein seemed to have taken wings. For two weeks the Argonauts sought for the silver fleece on a diet of bannock—a veritable dough matrix, flour and water; for their baking powder was effervescing somewhere in the muddy waters of Montreal River.

Toil-tried and gaunt of stomach, they had paddled to the edge of a shelving rock that sloped gently to the lake's edge one evening to camp.

"Beats me!" Red said, as they spread their meagre belongings on the camping ground.

"What beats you?" Peter asked in sheer vacuity.

"Why, where that vein's got to."

"Guess it's over the Great Divide," and Peter spat contemptuously.

"Not by a jugful 'tain't!" Red objected. He pointed to a lone bleached pine that stood on a point of the rock. "See that stub that the lightnin's made a corkscrew of?"

"Is it in that?" Peter asked derisively.

"I shot a hawk from that long scrawny limb an hour after I see that pink streak in the cliff the time I was here before; so it can't be far away, can it?"

"Must be adjacent, or a long, long way from nowhere," Peter agreed.

"I thought it was a kind of paint—pink ocher, or somethin', same's the Indians used," Red said reminiscently, "an' I went up to it an' dug with my jackknife an' cut into somethin' I thought was tin. I carried a hunk of it around in my pocket for about a month; then I lost it. I kinder think it wore a hole

in my pants pocket an' sorter dribbled out. Wasn't that silver, right enough?"

"Who was you guidin' for, did you say, Red?"

"A Cockney Lord, I told you onct—Sir John Snoopers, or Cudleigh, or somethin'. What's that got to do with it, Pete?"

"Was the gent packin' much booze?"

Red flared up angrily. "I know what you mean, Pete! You think I'm stringin' you; but I ain't. I got my bearin's now, an' I bet you we're gettin' hot!"

"I guess I'm gettin' pretty lean on it," Peter growled. "Them dough flapjacks seems to've glued my insides together." He picked up the flour bag and weighed it in his hand contemplatively. "There's the makin's of 'bout two more curlin' stones in this bag," he adjudged, "an' then we go without our repast, Red. I'm goin' to hit the trail acrost country for Elk City in the mornin'. My advice to you is to do likewise, an' come back to find that silver mountain when the railroad trains 're runnin' reg'lar."

"I don't see nothin' to get gay about," Meekins objected. "I ain't lied to you; I've kinder got mixed on the lay of the land, that's all."

"I ain't kickin'," Peter said quietly. "A prospector's got to stand for a few fool trips. Silver veins is kinder like gold leads, I guess—they're apt to get mislaid. I've knowed a gold outcrop in British Columbia that I've gone huntin' for with a

fellow that knew just where it was, to be found over in the next county by another man."

Peter's satire always subdued Red's cruder attack. After a short, sullen silence he said, "I'll mix a bannock if you'll get some wood for a fire, Pete."

Wright took up his axe and scanned a bluff of rock that raised its hard forbidding face above a copse of birch and poplar.

Red, following the direction of Peter's eyes, said, "It was sorter like that cliff where I see the cobalt bloom. I'll scratch around that stone nose in the mornin'."

It seemed to Red that Peter was a long time over his quest for wood. When he had pounded the plastic mass of flour and water into something that looked like a round dough medal, he put it into the frypan and stood the pan on edge against a stone. Then he gathered some twigs and birchbark and started a fire. As the resinous bark sizzled and the flame shot up, Red cocked his ear toward the gloomy forest. The metallic click of steel on rock carried from its depths. "Guess Pete's prospectin' ol' baldhead up yonder," he muttered. "It'd be a good joke on him if he dropped onto that silver vein."

Presently there was a crashing of small growth as though a bull moose was charging down the hillside, and Peter, dragging three long poles of birch under his arm, emerged from the woods. He threw the poles clatteringly to the ground and, stooping to the birch firelight, drew a magnifying

glass from his pocket and critically examined something he held in his hand.

"What you got there, Pete?" Red queried.

For answer Wright passed the glass and object of examination over to Meekins. The latter, after a long, intent look at the fragment of rock, sprang to his feet excitedly, crying, "By the jumped up Jimmy Robison, that's it! You've got it, Pete!"

"Looks powerful like it. I ain't much posted on this cobalt stuff; but I've heard there ain't no pink rock in these parts except cobalt bloom, and that's a kind of weather-rotted silver."

Meekins was caressing the substance gently with his fingertips. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Say, there's wire silver in that!" He cut at it eagerly with his knife, revealing glistening specks of pure metal looking like pinheads. "It is silver!" he yelled exultantly. "A knife won't cut no mineral that's found in these parts 'cept silver."

"I guess a knife wouldn't cut this bannock none too much pretty soon," Peter declared as he shot out his long arm and retrieved their supper from where it rested fair in the fire, neatly black-capped by the frypan, Red in his excitement having overturned the utensil.

"Gee whilikin!" Meekins exclaimed. "It would be mighty tough luck to starve to death in the bush just as we was worth a million."

While they waited for their supper Peter cut a post ten feet long, squared its top, and wrote his name, the date, and hour on one of its flattened

sides, saying, "When we've grubbed we'll plant this discovery post, an' first thing in the mornin' we'll hike to the outside an' file the claim."

When they had eaten, the two climbed the glacis that inclined to the base of a huge cliff. Even in the dim light of approaching night they could make out the silver trail that lay bedded in the diabase rock, standing almost perpendicular.

With his axe Peter cut a hole in the clay, and they planted the discovery post which carried on its square sides a flaunting notice to all the world that forty acres of this mineral land had been taken up.

"Now she's ourn, so to speak," Red grunted, as he built a little cairn of stones about the post.

Floundering down the hillside, Red babbled of wealth and its manifest obligations. He was going to show some people something, and others that had been meek in spirit and lean of purse he was going to pasture in Elysian fields. All this was to transpire in his native village of Coboconk.

By the little campfire Peter sat morosely silent. A fierce cupidity, roused in him by the undoubted richness of the claim, was increased by Red's talk of his share. Peter's precarious position came to him with startling vividness. Red would be satisfied with nothing less than half, and Haskell would claim half of Peter's share, according to his contract. Silently Wright vowed that he'd share with one of the two men only. And the moment of decision had arrived; for, having staked the three claims in Dufferin on his own miner's license, which

exhausted its privilege, he would have to file the Pink Eye claim either in the name of Haskell or of Meekins.

"Let me see your miner's license, Red," he asked presently.

"I ain't got no license," Meekins declared.

"You ain't got a license! You're a fine prospector!" Peter swore in his dismay.

"I wasn't prospectin'; I was workin' for you," Meekins objected. "I didn't have no five dollars to pay for it, an' you said you hadn't none too much money; so I never said nothin' 'bout it."

Wright relapsed into brooding silence, puffing fitfully at his pipe, his mind tortured with this new thing of large finance.

"Hanged if you don't take the cake!" Red snarled after a time. "One'd think you'd lost your mother-in-law. Does gettin' rich quick give you the blues, Pete?"

"I'm goin' to turn in," Wright answered surlily. "We've got to beat the birds to the early worm in the mornin'."

"Wisht I could sleep!" Red whined as Peter rolled in his blankets. "Seems to be somethin' the matter with me. Maybe it's bein' rich all of a suddent. Did you ever have dyspepsy, Pete?" he asked presently. "My stomach's called a board meetin' to see why I ain't puttin' no meat into it."

"Put it to sleep!" Wright growled.

After a time Red took Peter's advice; but the giver of it lay wide eyed, staring up at the stars,

thinking, thinking. Avarice was writing upon his soul words of sophistry that were the doom of honour and fealty. Why should he, who was the actual discoverer of this wealth, the means of its obtaining, give half of it to a drunkard who would never have found anyone else with faith enough to take this trip, and also half of his own share to a man sitting in comfort at home, who had risked a few paltry dollars and had the claims up in Dufferin for his money. The point of honour hardly entered Peter's thoughts. That eight-inch vein of silver meant that the forty acres was worth half a million at least. It was the large sum of money at stake that held sway over his mind.

Late in the night Wright fell asleep. At the first caw of a crow he sprang to his feet and wakened his companion with a rough shake of the shoulder.

Red sat up, looked stupidly at Wright, and asked, "Say, Pete, did we find that vein? It's kinder mixed in my mind like a dream."

'Shake yourself," Peter answered laconically.

"An' as to breakfast," Red remarked, as he set a copper kettle on the fire Peter had lighted, "there's bannock well done an' rare. An' for bev'rage, squaw tea—the same bein' decocted from these," and he dropped into the kettle a handful of shiny green leaves from a plant allied to the wintergreen.

"We'll go up an' see what she looks like in daylight," Wright said when they had eaten.

"I guess she's all O. K.," Red remarked as they stood at the base of the cliff. "That hang-over

yonder is what I first see five years ago. It was like a great pink eye blinkin' at a feller. Say, that'd make a good name for the mine, Pete—the Pink Eye. Is it a go? Kinder ketchy, ain't it?"

"Good's any, I guess," Wright answered. "Let's get to the top an' see what she's like on the roof."

On the summit they found the vein running due west for over two hundred feet. Here the silver, oxidized, was almost devoid of the pink bloom and ran like a ribbon between holding walls of diabase rock in a brown fretwork of wire silver, looking like an artistic inlay of bronze.

"She's the real cheese!" Red opined. "A cool million buys my half, an' not a cent less!"

Wright looked at Meekins out of heavy, sullen eyes. There was something incongruous, flagrant, about this talk of a million emanating from a man who, when hanging round the hotels, borrowed a quarter from anybody who would lend it. He turned and fought his way through the brush down the hill, followed by Meekins. When they came to the discovery post, Wright kicked the stones away, pulled the timber up, and swung it to his shoulder.

Red stared. "What are you doin', Pete?" he asked. Wright had started on down the hill with his burden. "Danged if he ain't gone plumb loony over this strike!" Meekins muttered as he plunged after Peter.

At the camp Wright seized the axe and cut the post into firewood.

"What's the idee, Pete? Wasn't it right?" Meekins asked, as Peter threw the sticks on the fire.

"I ain't goin' to stake this claim—not for awhile yet," Wright answered quietly.

"You ain' goin' to stake! What in the name of Moses did you come here for, then?"

"Partly lookin' for silver, an' partly to see that Peter Wright didn't come out the small end of the horn."

Again Red stared in amazement. "I guess I best stake that claim myself, then, he declared presently.

"On what?"

"What d'you mean, Pete?"

"You ain't got no miner's license."

Red blinked in defeat—he had forgotten his documentary shortage. "But you've got a license, Pete. What's the sense of this monkey business?"

"No, I ain't; I staked them three claims in Dufferin on my permit.

"Ain't you got nothin' to pertect this silver mine after we've found it? That's a nice way to go prospectin', ain't it?"

"I got Haskell's license in my pocket—there ain't nothin' staked on that yet," and Peter's blue-gray eyes looked into Red's in a way that made Meekins shiver.

"Ain't you goin' to stake on that, then?"

"And give you half, and split my half with him?"

"I got to get half. 'Tain' none of my business how you fix it up with the other feller," Red snarled.

"If I staked on Haskell's license, Red, where'd you come out!"

"I'd law you for it, Pete, thet's where I'd get it!"

"And I'd produce in court this contract that carries the name of a gent called Meekins, whereby said Meekins agrees to work for one Peter Wright six months for three dollars a day and grub."

"That contract don't say nothin' about my givin' up my silver vein here, does it?"

"'Tain't yours, an' never was! Your vein got mislaid—I found this one."

"An' you're goin' to bunko me out of my half, eh?"

"I ain't said anythin' about your half—you've done all that talk. An' I ain't said I was goin' to bunko you. I just said I wasn't goin' to stake it now. I'm comin back when the cricks break up in the spring—that'll be 1908. Can you get that through your head, Red?"

"An find somebody's jumped the mine! That's what'll happen, an' it'll serve you right."

"Nobody ain't goin' to find it. It's been planted here a few thousand years, an' nobody did. You knew it was here, an' been lookin' for it two weeks an' couldn't find it. Besides, runnin' water'll soon freeze up an' nobody can get in. I'll be first man up in the spring."

Red pondered over the situation; then he said,

"What d'you want to take this chance of losin' a fortune for?"

"'Cause I got to act square with my partner,"

Peter answered in hypocrisy. "If I stake in 1907, I got to give him half an' live up to the contract; but if I stake in 1908 you get the half that's comin' to you. You've got the best right to it, ain't you? He wasn't never in on this deal. It won't make no diff'rence to me which man I give it to."

The venom of avarice was in Red's soul with the same virulence that it was in Peter's. He understood his partner now. If Haskell did not know they had found this mine in 1907, he would have no legal claim. Wright was determined to keep at least half, and meant to cheat the man who would give him the least trouble. To stake in Haskell's name would make a three-cornered fight, with a chance of Meekins being frozen out. Besides, they could do nothing till spring, anyway; no purchaser could very well come up to see it, and they could not mine the silver.

"If I wait till you're clear of that farmer, will you agree that we're halfers in the Pink Eye?" Red asked.

"Yes; 'cause I'm goin' to act on the level with you, Red."

"How am I goin' to pull through the winter?" Meekins queried, actuated by a new thought. "I'd be feared to go out prospectin'—I might get froze to death just when I'd made this fortune an' never get a nickel of it."

"I'll pay your board till spring if you keep your mouth shut. If you don't you'll lose as much as I will."

"Well, that's a bargain," Red agreed. "Just write that on a paper."

"You got to take my word for it, Red," Peter answered doggedly.

"An' get the same throw-down Haskell's gettin', eh, Pete?"

"You got to take your choice whether you take a half or give it to him. If I wrote you a paper like that, first time you got full somebody'd read it, an' they'd come in with dog trains on the snow an' beat us out."

"Well, Pete, if you won't you won't, I guess, for you think you've got the best of it; but if you try to freeze me out I'll go to the man that grubstaked you and split. Then you'll get a quarter share."

"You won't have no cause to do anything but take the same size share as I get, Red; that's if you keep your mouth shut. Now let's pack up and pull out," Peter answered quietly.

Looking up suddenly as they packed, he saw Meekins transferring something from beneath his shirt to his blankets. "Hold on, Red!" he commanded angrily. "You ain't goin' to pack that silver out!"

"You bet I just am! Half of all the silver in that mine belongs to me, an' why can't I take them pieces?" Meekins retorted.

" 'Cause first time you got drunk you'd show 'em an' blab. Throw 'em in the lake, Red."

"I'll see you dead first, Peter Wright, an' then I won't!" Meekins swore.

A red flush of anger suffused the tawny face of Wright; the blue eyes turned to steel gray. It was the first time Red had felt the presence of passion in his partner, and, facing the tall, lithe Peter, so close that he felt the other's hot breath, Red dropped his eyes to the big sinewy hands, the fingers of which were stretched like the talons of a hawk. An instinctive knowledge flashed through his mind that unless he complied the fingers would be at his throat, and he was afraid.

"You're carryin' things with a high hand, Pete; but I don't want to have no row," Meekins said sullenly. He threw the pieces of silver far out into the waters of the lake.

"It's for your good as much as mine," Wright declared. "We can't afford to take no chance."

Lean of stomach to the edge of starvation, the prospectors found their way back to the land of food. And for months Wright lived a season of apprehension. In his dreams he saw men and machinery on the Pink Eye taking out carloads of silver, each carload in itself a fortune. Meekins was a leech, a vampire, bleeding him for money; more than once, when under the influence of liquor, threatening to raise money on the mine if Peter did not give it to him.

Some work had been done on the Dufferin claims and several letters written to Haskell to keep him quiet. In one of these Peter, as salve to his conscience, wrote that it would give him joy to be able to send Haskell a check for ten thousand dollars;

that if he did strike it rich at any time he would see that Haskell lost no money over his mining venture. At this time Peter really meant it. Daily he was making mental bargains with Haskell; figuratively setting aside a sum for him when he had cleaned up over the Pink Eye.

In the spring, when the ice of the rivers broke up with a remonstrative crackling like the fire of musketry, Wright and Meekins went up the Montreal and staked the mine. Not until the claim was filed in their joint names did Meekins feel safe.

The staking of the Pink Eye, and the samples shown, caused a stampede to Gowganda. Prospectors rushed in, followed by capitalists, looking for plums with which to float huge companies.

The Pink Eye was sold for a million dollars; one hundred thousand paid down when it was passed by the buyer's engineer, balance to be paid in instalments.

When Haskell read this item of mining news it made him gasp; then it made him think, and his thoughts left him suspicious. He had been wondering why he could not come face to face with Wright. And Peter's letters had been sparing of detail in the extreme, tryingly apathetic as to the future development of the Dufferin claims. And the finding of this rich mine had come so quickly after Peter was legally clear of Haskell.

"I believe Wright's a crook," he declared.

His lawyer was of the same opinion.

"I'll make him pony up if he's done me," Haskell declared.

But making Peter pony up shaped somewhat into an impossibility as Haskell sought for the necessary evidence. His lawyer sent an agent to hark back over Wright's trail for the last several months. The agent returned declaring that all miners were a gang like unto the Forty Thieves; they were banded together to shield each other in their dishonesty.

"It looks like a bad case," the lawyer advised. "We'll have to wait till we get some evidence."

That very day Haskell almost had his evidence. By chance he was introduced to Red Meekins in a hotel. Meekins was now a distinguished citizen, one of the new millionaires, a man to introduce other men to. He was also, at that moment, most certainly under the influence of liquor. Meekins, sober, could carry in his mind only the material benefit of Peter's having acted square by him; drunk, his mind missed the main point, and retained an unreasoning hatred of the man who had mastered him standing face to face in the bush.

It had taken Haskell half an hour to get to the point where Meekins, leaning over the table, bleared at him and said, "Pete's a crook, Mr. Haskell. He did you up right enough, an' you didn't know it. That's why I sold out—I was afeared of him. But if he'd tried his bunko on me, d'you know what I'd a done?" Red hung on his query and knitted his heavy red brows.

"No; what would you have done?" Haskell asked, trying to mask his eagerness in a subdued tone.

"I'd a put Tom Gilder at him. He'd've tied him up for forty years, an' then made Pete toe the mark!"

Red brought his fist down as an accompaniment to a fierce oath. It came in contact with his glass; the fingers opened and closed on it; he gulped the liquor down. His mind flitted at a tangent, and he fell to cursing the whiskey. He had forgotten all about the mine.

Haskell, unwisely too eager, said, "How did Wright do me up, Meekins? Tell me, and I'll make it worth your while."

Red stared at the speaker, a glimmer of intelligence stealing into his eyes. "Say, Mr. Haskell, anythin' I say when I'm full don't go, see? Let's take a walk. I feel sorter uncomfor'able," he said.

It had filtered into Red's mind that Haskell was after evidence. That meant a suit, and a suit meant tying up the mine and stopping of payments.

Meekins started off tortuously for the desired walk. Haskell purposely lost him in the rotunda of the hotel. Then he sat down to recast the little scene that had just been enacted. The name Tom Gilder lingered with vivid insistence. If Gilder had the power to bring Wright to account, he must know all about the Pink Eye. Haskell determined to find this man Gilder.

"Do I know Tom Gilder?" replied the first man

Haskell asked this question of. "I should say so! Everybody does."

"Who is he?"

"Well, he's the limit, if you ask me. He was a pretty clever lawyer once. Is still, really; but now he's a kind of Sherlock Holmes in the mining game. If he got after any of my claims, I'd just tell him to go out and select what he wanted."

This vivid description of Gilder explained the great faith of Meekins and suggested to Haskell the wisdom of at least having an interview with Gilder.

He found him in a dingy office sitting at a little oak desk against a background of leather covered law books. A pair of pale blue eyes, set so close together that there seemed scarcely room for the thin high-bridged nose, peered at Haskell with questioning intensity.

Haskell had come with the idea of sizing up Gilder; but he found himself almost at once explaining his position down to the minutest detail.

Gilder's first question was, "Have you any papers?"

He read the letters of Peter Wright without comment. The contract he perused twice; then, peering over his glasses, said, "That contract isn't fit to govern the working plans of a pair of owls! But it cooks your goose in a hearing before a Judge."

Haskell gave a sigh of resignation. "Looks as if I'd got to stand for being done up by that crook,"

he said. "Haven't I got a chance to make him pay back that fifteen hundred he did me out of?"

The shadow of a mirthless smile played about Gilder's thin lips. "Would you be willing to take a hundred thousand dollars from Wright in settlement?" he asked.

Haskell gasped in astonishment. He stared into the placid eyes, so like little knobs of blue china, wondering if he had heard aright.

"I think I could make him settle for that amount," Gilder added.

"Then, by jinks, go ahead!" and Haskell slapped his knee as though he had stamped an agreement.

"My fee will be one-third of whatever amount we accept," Gilder advised.

"But you said I had a weak case; that a Judge would give it against me on that contract."

"You have no case at all, really," Gilder answered calmly; "but we're not going before a Judge, not if I can help it. You can leave the matter in my hands.

Then Haskell went back to his somnolent village, and the subtle power of Gilder fell on Peter the unjust. Writs, and injunctions, and cautions against issuing a patent for the Pink Eye, and summonses to appear for examination for discovery, blew upon him a veritable paper blizzard.

The English syndicate that had bought the mine was served with notice of Haskell's claim. And Wright soon received letters of strong protest from

the British Isles, instead of Bank of England notes.

Red Meekins drank to drown his sorrow and wept copiously. He assailed Peter morning, noon, and night to settle. "If this Gowganda boom busts," he wailed, "we'll never catch another sucker to buy the Pink Eye, an' if the vein peters out we'll be on our uppers again, an' what's worse our reputations'll be wore to a frazzle!"

When Peter learned that Tom Gilder was after him, he knew it was a hold-up, a sure sign that Haskell had no evidence; so he tried to bring the case on for hearing before the Mining Commission.

But the Mining Commission said it was a case for the courts, and the court declared it was a question of evidence. Gilder proved that he had two men out in the wilds looking for witnesses who knew all about it; also intimated that Wright had bribed the witnesses to keep out of the way.

Gilder chuckled when the case was thrown over to the next sitting of the court, and went back to his dingy little office, to sit, like a spider in his web, waiting for the coming of Peter to settle.

And Peter crawled reluctantly up the narrow flight of stairs that led to the dingy office the very day he received a letter from the English syndicate stating that if within fifteen days they were not given a clear title to the Pink Eye they would cancel the purchase and ask him to return the hundred thousand paid, with the addition of their costs.

Peter had gone to Gilder's office in the fatuous

belief that he would escape with a payment of the ten thousand dollars he had been foolish enough to write Haskell about. But when he departed he left behind properly attested documents securing to the man who had grubstaked him one hundred thousand dollars out of the purchase price of the Pink Eye.

IV

THE SPOTTED DOG MINE

NIPISSING was proud of the Cobalt Bloom Hotel. Its huge square frame dominated the ruck of miners' shacks and small stores like a military blockhouse; its big office was to miners and men of capital what the Waldorf corridor is to a Wall Street broker.

One night Red Meekins sat in a chair eyeing moodily the restless throng that babbled incessantly of ten thousand-ounce ore, and cobalt bloom, and million-dollar companies. The glib lipping of large moneys depressed him; for he was decidedly short of working sinew. Perhaps it was this sense of monetary isolation that caused his eyes to follow admiringly a handsome coachdog that hovered tenaciously close to a pair of legs distinctly labelled "English" by the triple-rolled whipcord trousers that adorned them.

Red's attention was presently diverted from the dog by a big foot which, lazily thrust out from a neighbouring chair, jabbed him in the calf. He turned morosely to inspect this socially inclined neighbour. His eyes failed to identify a gable shouldered man of unnecessary length, who peered at him humourously out of watery blue eyes set in

a ridiculously small red face, which seemed all but obliterated by a wilderness of straw coloured whiskers.

Red's puzzled stare appeared entirely amusing to the man who had kicked him. He laughed and asked, "How are ye, Red? How's that claim pannin' out?"

"I guess that voice is Peloo Trout," Meekins said tentatively; "but them muttonchops is a new one on me."

"They're kinder new to home too," Trout, admitting the identification, answered. "I growed 'em in the way of business."

"Say Peloo, what kind of a dog is that?" Meekins queried.

Trout ran his fingers through the whiskers reflectively, recalling the breeds of dogs he was familiar with. "I know them kind," he said reflectively; "but I jus' kinder forget the name. I got it!" he declared, brightening up. "It's the pokerdot breed. I see lots of 'em in New York, time I sold the Beaver Dam mine."

"Danged if I wouldn't like to own that pup!" Red exclaimed.

Peloo laughed.

Red, overconscious of his lack of funds, misunderstood and said angrily, "S'pose you think I'm broke again, Peloo; couldn't even buy a dog?"

"'Tain't that, Red. There ain't nobody in this camp got money enough to buy that pokerdot. The man what owns him is a pal of mine. That's him

with the delicate stomach," and Peloo indicated a slim young man whose decided stoop had originated this description.

"He don't look up to much—not to own such a handsome pup," Meekins adjudged.

"He's a Lord in London; so's his father," Peloo explained. "I've got him on the string right enough too."

"For a grubstake?" Meekins queried listlessly.

"I've cut out prospectin'," Peloo declared emphatically. "Breathin' mosquitoes in the summer give me hay fever, an' wallerin' round in the snow never panned out nothin' but chilblains. When I see mavericks that's been bank clerks jus' goin' out to the bush an' locatin' mines worth millions, plumb out of fool's luck, I see it's no game for men."

"What you doin', then, Peloo?"

Trout drew a card from his coat pocket and passed it dramatically to Meekins. "That's me," he advised, Peloo Trout & Co., Mining Brokers. I'm the whole works too. I give up lookin' for mines what couldn't be found nohow, an' I'm dealin' in mines as is found."

"Looks businesslike," Red commented.

"That's why I grew the whiskers," and Peloo stroked the bushy entanglement affectionately. "When I was in New York, time I sold the Beaver Dam, I see all the brokers was clean shaved or had a sporty beard, an' I caught onto the idee. Bein' in business, a feller had got to shave every day if he went in fer that kind of face trimmin'. That cost a

heap of money; so I jus' let mine grow. A tall man looks all right in whiskers, anyway."

"Well, how's business in mines, Peloo?" Meekins asked.

"Well, it's lookin' up. I got three or four fellers on the string that's got slathers of capital. A man's got to graft to get on in this game. When I see a bunch of outsiders come into the hotel I jus' look over the register an' get their names an' where they come from, an' then it don't take long to get in with 'em."

"See Hank Pilkins knockin' about?"

Peloo chuckled. "I heerd you evicted him, Red."

"I ain't strong on 'em law terms, Peloo; but he ain't been back to the shack he built on my claim since I swatted him."

"I heerd he got a black eye fer jumpin' your mine, Red, an' that the Minin' Commission give you a patent for the claim. What're you goin' to do, Red, develop the claim?"

"On what?"

Peloo chuckled again. "Cleaned out, eh? Whisky an' law'll get any man's bankroll, I don't care how big 'tis."

Red's prodigality in the matter of bar patronage was so much a matter of general knowledge that he passed over Peloo's animadversion in silence, and the latter added:

"What you oughter do, Red, is sell out. These suckers ain't goin' to keep on comin' here forever."

"I don't want to sell," Red declared surlily.

"What you want to do," Peloo reiterated, "is to sell a half interest for what you figure the whole mine's worth; that's the game. What shape is your claim in?"

"It's mostly forty acres of rocks, labelled R. L. 678 in the Recorder's office."

"That description's kinder tame for sellin' purposes. Most of 'em is described as havin' from seventeen to thirty veins carryin' silver. That's a good way to put it, Red, carryin' silver—see? That kinder makes out that all that's needed is capital to develop an' find the silver. How about that vein I heerd Pilkins found?"

"I guess he must've took it away with him, Peloo. I ain't found nothin' but a stringer of calcite—that's between me an' you."

"Didn't you have to take your affidavit that you'd found mineral in place when you come to record the claim? Ain't that the law?"

"Danged if that spotted dog don't get me!" Red offered in the way of evasion. "Wisht I owned him!"

"I guess it'd be a heap better to get his boss to buy a half interest in your mine. I can work it, if you'll let me fix up the description of the property. I could steer the Hon. Lord Fonsby up against the idee of findin' that big vein Pilkins was supposed to have staked on. Didn't he show the Recorder a hunk of silver ore, an' try to make out that you'd found nothin'?"

"Yes."

"Well, where'd he find it?"

"Danged if I know. I've punched the whole forty acres as full of little drill holes as a pepperbox, an' I've trenched till the ground looks like a piece of Scotch plaid."

"An' got nothin'?"

Red diplomatically ignored the latter question. "There's a big ledge of rock runnin' clean acrost the claim," he said reflectively. "It's got a bald face twenty feet high, an' I kinder thought Pilkins might've struck a vein in that, same's they found in the La Rose an' Nipissin' at first; but the only danged thing unusual from one end to the other is the log shack Pilkins built plumb up ag'in' this cliff when I was away in Toronto."

"Time you was boozin', eh?"

"Time you wasn't payin' for whatever I was doin'!" Red answered crossly.

"There ain't nothin' to get mad about," Peloo reasoned. "There's Pilkins, he ain't never been knowed to stand drinks for the crowd. That's why we was all glad when you knocked the tar out of him. An' speakin' of that," Peloo continued, "if you want me to make a dicker with Lord Fonsby, we got to make a splurge about your claim—see?"

"How, Peloo?"

"It would be a good idee to treat the whole house right away. I'd put it up to the fellers what was doin' in the way of a deal, and first thing you'd know your mine'd have a rep'tation like Nipissin'. It's business, that's what it is. There's two or three

New York fellers here buyin' mines, an' they'd all get tryin' to beat each other to it, first thing you'd know."

"I ain't got the money," Red objected despondently.

"I got it," Peloo declared, "an' if I'm your agent, gettin' ten per cent., I'll grubstake you for drinks on the house an' other necessary expenses."

Meekins finally agreed to Broker Trout's proposal, and the latter circulated among the complacent miners, everyone of whom was entirely willing to help Red land a man of means, especially an Englishman.

This part of the game was familiar to Meekins. He acted his rôle with enthusiasm. At the proper time he rose to his feet and said, "Gentlemen, there's to be a spirit meetin' in the next room. If you'll kindly take your partners. This is on me."

A general exodus to the bar ensued. Peloo, taking advantage of the turmoil, brought Meekins and the Englishman together.

"This is the Hon. Lord Reginald Fonsby of London, and this is Mr. Red Meekins—'Lucky Red' he's called—who's discovered the greatest silver proposition since the camp was nothin' but a bald headed knob of rock."

"I was takin' stock of your pup," Red blurted out. "I see husky train dogs, an' them sausage dogs of the Dutchmen, an' most all kinds of dogs in my time; but that pokerdot breed has got 'em all

skinned for looks." Red reached down and affectionately stroked the delighted animal's head.

The "Hon. Lord's" smile of amusement turned to one of satisfaction. "Yes, by Jove!" he said. "Achilles has been pretty well about with me."

"Step along into the bar, Lord Fonsby," Peloo admonished.

As Red followed he whispered to Peloo, "What did he say the dog's name was?"

"Kinder think it was Axle Grease. Them dogs runs under a wagon most of the time, an' it may be a kind of English joke."

Peloo's recruits acted their parts well. They lavished encomiums upon Red and his new mine. Three young Yale men who had come to the new silver field looking for adventure and investment were in the seventh campus of joy; they joined hands and did a Maypole dance around Meekins. An overzealous henchman seared the Honourable's cheek with his hot breath as he whispered confidentially, "That Red Meekins is the feller what discovered the Nipissing mine; only they beat him out of it. He's found half the mines about here; but he's too modest. That's Red's weak streak; he's too cussed modest——"

He was cut short by a howl of anguish. Some one had stepped on the pokerdot dog.

Red reached down and lifted the dog to the bar, saying, "Boys, I'd rather some galoot swatted me than hurt that pup. He's the slickest thing in dog flesh I ever see. Gentlemen!" Red cleared his

throat and repeated solemnly, "Gentlemen!" There was a hush of attention, and he proceeded, "I've got a hunch, an idee. I'm goin' to name my mine after this pokerdot breed of pup. I hereby label her the Spotted Dog mine!"

There was a yell of applause. When it was subdued by the command of Peloo, Red added:

"The drinks is on me as a christenin', an' it runs into wine. Barkeep, set up the swan-neck bottles, them with the goldy locks."

Peloo turned pale; for he would have to pay. Surely Red was making the bluff unnecessarily strong.

As they drank the wine Red whispered to Peloo, "P'r'aps that Hon'rable'll feel it's up to him to give me that pokerdot. Pour him another glass of wine; it'll make him loosen up."

"You are sure goin' some, Red," Peloo commented; "but kinder ease up on the buyin' now. You done your share."

As the mine boosters finished their wine and were turning away, Fonsby slipped the collar from his dog's neck and handed it to the bartender. Then when they were in the outer room he told Achilles to get his collar. The dog went back and, standing on his hind legs, looked pleadingly at the drink dispenser. The latter handed over the leather strap, and Achilles came bounding out to his master.

At that instant Hank Pilkins entered the room with a brindle bulldog named Esau at his heels. Esau was the bully of Nipissing in a canine way,

and when he saw a dog seemingly in some kind of scuffle his perverted fighting instincts carried him into the fray with ferocious alacrity. In a second a wild scrimmage ensued. Men were bowled over like ninepins by the fighting bodies caroming against their legs.

Between the casual interference of sprawling men and the great activity of Achilles, Esau missed his thrust for the enemy's throat, and found, to his angry astonishment, a set of long fangs buried in the back of his neck. He was being considerably chewed.

Pilkins saw this, and with an oath swung a heavy boot into the ribs of Achilles. As he poised himself for another kick a strong hand gripped his coat collar, and he was elevated parabolically, to descend head first full on top of his pugnacious dog. Scrambling to his feet, he faced Red Meekins, who said with quiet menace:

"I don't stand for no man kickin' a dog as is only pertectin' hisself ag'in' a fool fightin' dog. You jus' keep that Esau to home, or somebody'll put a pill into him."

Pilkins raised his voice in anger; but the manager of the hotel came between the two and assured Pilkins that he would have him thrown into the street if he didn't subside.

Fonsby held out his hand to Red, saying: "By Jove! Mr. Meekins, you did that deuced cleverly. Awfully obliged, you know."

Peloo, who had gone over the falls in the little

cataract of men that had engulfed the dogs, heard this as he stood adjusting his disarranged whiskers, and promptly seized upon the opportunity to introduce business.

"There's a little room behind the bar. Let's git out of this noisy crowd," he said.

"By Jove! that's a corking idea," Fonsby agreed, "and you gentlemen will join me in a social glass, I hope."

Peloo nudged Meekins in the ribs with his elbow as they entered the private room, and pulling a chair to a little table he said, "Have a seat, your Hon. Lordship," adding in more flippant oratory, "Yank that stool up, Red!"

"It's jolly complimentary of you, Mr. Trout," Fonsby remarked as he sat down, "but I'm not a Lord, by any means. The governor is; but he's hale and hearty."

"P'r'aps I kinder got mixed in individuals," Peloo hazarded. "Readin' in the papers about Lord Fonsby I guess made me think you was him."

"The governor is Lord Ivington," Fonsby explained, rising to touch a button in the wall.

"He's kiddin' us about them names," Meekins whispered to Peloo.

"It's his stepfather, Red; that's how the names don't agree," Trout advised.

As Fonsby returned to his seat, Red said, "Peloo was tellin' me you didn't want to sell this pup," and Meekins caressed the shapely mottled head which the dog, knowing out of instinct about the man's

sympathy, had thrust across his knee. Fonsby's face showed mystification, and Peloo came to the rescue:

"Soon's Red sees that dog he was fer buyin' him, an' I jus' said that I guessed there wasn't nothin' doin' in that line."

The door of the room opened and a man, answering the call of the bell, entered, followed by a roughly dressed prospector. The latter took a quick look at the group by the table, and said:

"That New York chap is goin' out on the train tonight, Red, an' he wants to know if you're goin' to make him a price on that mine of yours or not. He says if you want to deal he'll hook up with you in half an hour. What'll I tell him?"

Meekins undiplomatically opened his mouth in astonishment. It was the first he had heard of a New Yorker with an offer; but Peloo scraped the toe of his boot up and down Red's shin beneath the table and took the latter's answer upon himself.

"Me an' Red an' this gentleman is purty busy, Tom. Jus' tell your friend that Red'll see him in New York."

"What you got to do with it, Peloo?" Tom asked with affected anger.

"Considerable—considerable, Tom. Mr. Meekins has placed his mine business in my office, an' the mine ain't fer sale."

"Does that go, Red?" Tom queried.

"It does. Peloo Trout & Co. is my agent."

Tom strode angrily from the room. Peloo chuckled and turning to Fonsby explained.

"Mr. Meekins has jus' plumb give away mines that has turned out worth millions; but he ain't goin' to sell this one fer the price of a prospect—not if Peloo Trout can help it! There's been about a dozen of 'em New York promoters tryin' to get on the soft side of Red. You see," he continued, "that Pilkins that owns the dog your pup licked found the biggest kind of a silver vein on Red's claim an' tried to beat him out of it. They all know this an' are dead stuck on gettin' his mine on the cheap."

"I'd like to see that vein, Mr. Meekins," Fonsby said innocently.

"Danged if I wouldn't too!" Red blurted out with even more innocence. Then he gave a sharp yelp of pain; for Peloo's boot had nearly cracked his shinbone beneath the table.

"Red's lookin' fer it," Peloo advised, "'cause Pilkins natur'lly wouldn't give his find away. An' it jus' seems's Pilkins had struck a streak of runnin' up ag'in' Red's fist. That's the second time he's had a rough an' tumble argyment with Red."

As Peloo held forth out of his plethora of words, he watched the Englishman's face from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, reading the look of intense interest that brightened Fonsby's blue eyes.

"Have you explored much for the vein?" Fonsby asked.

"He's jus' been rootin' round," Peloo hastened to

substitute for the frank admission he was certain Red would make.

"I've been kinder shy on capital," Red declared.

"Lost his money when that bank in Toronto busted last winter," Peloo explained.

This was just a trifle sudden for Red's equanimity. He laughed.

"You take your losses good naturedly. I like that," Fonsby remarked.

"I was jus' thinkin' of the feller I hired to locate that vein," Red explained, fancying he had detected a drawl of suspicion in the other's remark. "He was one of them fellers that's got a kind of crotched switch fer locatin' wells an' things. He tramped purty nigh all over that forty acres, an' all of a suddent he stopped still as though he'd been paralyzed in his j'ints, his face all twisted up, and the switch that he was grippin' with both hands commenced to dip. Only I'm kinder mixed. It was an electric patent kind of crotch he had—that's the idee. Then he says to me, 'It's down there!' Then me an' a man trenched fer two days, an' fin'lly we come on a groundhog's nest."

Fonsby sat back in his chair and laughed. "What did the man say?" he asked finally.

"I never heerd. I guess he's runnin' yet."

"Red got hot under the collar an' kinder went fer that feller," Peloo elucidated.

Fonsby suddenly straightened up in his chair and said, "Look here! I don't mind saying that I've

got deuced interested in your mine, Mr. Meekins, and in yourself, too, to be candid."

Red had to suppress another yelp of pain. Beneath the table Peloo's toe was cautioning him to be wary.

"You said something about lack of capital," Fonsby continued. "Now, I've come here to invest a few pounds if I find something—well, something, you know."

"Red's got it—he's got somethin' big!" and Peloo wagged his bushy head sagaciously.

"I'll tell you what you do," Red offered. "You come down an' bunk with me in the shack, an' when I've found the big vein I'll give you first chance to buy the mine."

"By Jove! that might cost a pretty penny! You'd want a million. Supposing I buy in now, and take a chance."

" 'Tain't for sale," Peloo declared, wagging his head despondently.

"I uster say that afore I see this dog of yours," Red declared; "but if you want to come down an' prospect, "an'll bring this pup to the shack, I ain't sayin' we mightn't make a deal."

"What's a half interest worth?"

Peloo held his breath, fearing Meekins would be too modest in his demands.

"You best come down with me to-morrow an' look the mine over," Red answered, "an' if it looks good I'll trade a half interest for this pup an' ten thousand dollars to boot."

Laughing over Red's unique proposal, the Englishman agreed at least to inspect the mine.

When the two men had parted from Fonsby, on the way out they met Tom. "What do I get out of it?" the latter asked.

"Out of what?" Pelo queried.

"Out of the sale. You don't mean to say you let English get away from you? When I see you go in there together I knowed what was doin', an' thought I'd boost things by springin' that yarn about a feller wantin' to buy. Didn't it help none?"

"You jus' leave that to Red," Peloo advised. "Guess he'll make it right with you, Tom."

"That's good enough for me," Tom answered. "Goodnight, fellers. Make your check payable at par, Red."

The result of Fonsby's visit to the Spotted Dog mine was a deal through which he became a half owner. Strangely enough, the illusiveness of the big vein appealed to him as a matter of exciting interest. Unknown to the partners, and quite beyond the value they placed upon his intelligence, Fonsby had interviewed the recording officer. With boyish enthusiasm discarding the triple-rolled trousers for a pair of heavy overalls, he rolled up his sleeves and went to work, perhaps with more energy than aptitude.

Such little idiosyncrasies as trying to clean a lamp chimney with a stick of dynamite, its end twisted in a handkerchief, caused Red to exercise a wise supervision which prevented actual disaster—at least up

to the time Achilles brought on the end of all things.

There always remained in Nipissing as a matter of discussion the question of which dog would have licked the other the night they hooked up if Pilkins hadn't interfered. The owner of Esau was ready to bet a thousand dollars that his dog could "eat up the piebald mongrel that Meekins chums with"; while Red avowed that he wasn't fighting dogs for a living, but that if they ever got together on their own account he'd back the spotted pup.

Red and Fonsby had been trenching and blasting for two months, and with meagre results. They had driven a small tunnel into the rocky cliff, following a calcite vein that at times held a blush of cobalt bloom as rosy as the cheek of a girl and again bleaching out in barrenness to an alabaster white. One morning Red drilled a hole in the tunnel, and, after their midday meal in the shack, went to a little pit where the dynamite was stored, returning with four sticks of the ferocious explosive.

"That drill this mornin' kinder sounded to me as though it was in metal. We'll put a shot in an' rip her up," he said.

Followed by the ever faithful Achilles, the two men plodded leisurely to their drift in the cliff. Fonsby held the four sticks of dynamite, handing three of them, one by one, to Meekins, who tamped them home with due caution in the drill hole, attaching a fuse. Then he said:

"Light the fuse, Fonsby, while I gather up these

tools. Then we'll get out. P'r'aps when we come back this hole'll be full of silver."

Fonsby put the fourth stick of dynamite down, struck a match, and lighted the fuse.

Red, having picked up his tools, called, "Come on! Sometimes these fuses run."

He was already on the move. Fonsby followed on the run, forgetting all about the finger of destruction he had discarded.

Achilles noticed this oversight, or perhaps he thought it a variation of the collar game. At any rate he harked back to his drill in retrieving, grabbed up in his jaws the little brown fiend, added the dangling fuse that was so like his leading strap, dislodging it with one sharp pull, and cantered joyously after the fleeing men.

As Red galloped he cast a look over his shoulder to make sure that Spot was following. One glance assured him that Spot was, and that he was charged with dynamite.

"My God! Man, run! Run for it!" he gasped, and Fonsby, instinctively turning his head, saw the Nemesis on their track.

He quickened his pace. So did Red. Their heavy boots threw gravel, and all records for speed were being smashed.

But the dog was in a hurry to deliver the goods. He too was showing speed. The fuse was a handicap on the canine—which was providential. Once it swirled round his legs like a whiplash and the sputtering end singed him in the belly. He rolled

himself out of the entanglement, and the men gained twenty yards. They had just breasted a little hill which lay as quiet and peaceful in the afternoon sun as though no travelling volcano was on the move. Now Red and Fonsby were on the level, racing for the shack, while Spot, good Spot, was down in the little hollow gathering up the stick of dynamite that had been switched from his jaws by a catch of the trailing fuse in the splintered end of a log he had short-cut rather sharply.

In all history of explosives probably no giant of expansion had ever been so tolerant of misuse as the cartridge Spot handled so cavalierly. It is one of the eccentricities of dynamite that it erupts when it gets good and ready,—patient at times under maltreatment, and again hasty as a red headed vixen.

And now, as Spot swung free the fuse, the brown power lay in his compressed jaws as innocuous as a wedge of cheese. He scurried blithely up the hill, rounding into the home stretch at its crest as Red panted:

"We'll make the shack! Shut the door and take a chance—we got to!"

As they journeyed the sprinters saw, with astonishment, men in the shack. In fact, Pilkins stood in the door. Evidently Pilkins had announced the vehement coming of Meekins & Co.; for other faces thrust themselves into the opening, grinning faces that contemplated the joyous spectacle of Meekins

and the English aristocrat evidently engaged in a foot race.

Cries of "Come on, Red! You win in a walk! Go it, English!" rent the air. "Fifty dollars on Red!" some one yelled.

The bulldog's heavy head showed between the legs of Pilkins, his yellow teeth bared in a snarl: for his little pig eyes had caught sight of his enemy trailing the Marathoners.

Red saw Fonsby cast a glance backward, and panted, "How's Spot makin' it? Is he comin'?"

"Rather!" the Englishman answered laconically, conserving his energy for increased speed.

Meekins rose to the spurt, and they raced neck and neck. Ten yards from the shack, five yards, the gravel path howling with the beat of their heavy boots! Now they had gained the doorway, and a jocular hand fell on Red's shoulder, almost yanking him on his face, as its owner cried exultantly, "You win, Red—by a nose!"

With a hoarse cry Meekins threw the speaker off and grabbed the door to shut it. It never budged, because Peloo Trout's enormous bulk rested in a chair tilted back against its pine boards.

A snarling yelp from Esau caused Red to swing on his heel. Spot had arrived. He stood in the chip yard, the bristles on his back erect in anger, and in his jaws the slim brown stick of dynamite, within a foot of it the sizzling end of the fuse.

With head low hung and legs wide set, Esau stood on the outer step ready for the fighting charge.

Others had seen the terrible picture, and when Red's wild cry of "Run for it, boys!" rang out, followed by a rush through the other door, they complied with alacrity, some of them outpacing Red, for he was considerably blown. Even Pilkins deserted his dog and cast in his lot with the others.

Fonsby, slim of limb, held his own with the runners and led the retreat down a hill which sloped away from the house they were evacuating to the smiling waters of Egg Lake, which lay, like the Pool of Siloam, the objective point of their hasty pilgrimage.

The demeanour of Esau and Spot during this trying time must pass unrecorded; but at the instant Fonsby reached the lake the ground trembled under their feet, the atmosphere crackled like breaking glass, and they saw the shack shoot upward, its logs twisting and writhing in the air, accompanied by a crashing roar as though seventeen peals of thunder had merged into one.

Red, half paralyzed, wiped his dripping brow and gazed out of stupid eyes toward the place where his habitation had stood.

Pilkins crawled out of the water, wrung out the tail of his coat, and cursed.

"By Jove! that was a close call!" Fonsby declared presently.

"Is there any more to go off?" Peloo asked. "'Cause if there is I'm goin' to chase the black bass."

Something of the disaster heated the quick blood

of Meekins. He turned savagely on Pilkins. "What was you an' your bandy legged cur doin' in my shack? What was all you fellers doin' there?" With glowering eye he swept the little group.

Peloo uttered mollifying words. "It wasn't Pilkins's fault, Red, not exactly. The fellers kidded him that he dassn't set Esau up ag'in' Spot, an' we jus' come down to talk it over. We was sorter restin' an' waitin' fer you to come home. That's all, Red. You can't blame the fellers. How'd they know that Spot was toting dynamite round fer you?"

"By Jove!" Fonsby broke in with. "I think it would be a jolly good idea to go up and see what condition things really are in."

Quiescently they all followed Red. Where the shack had stood there was a scooped out hollow as though a steam shovel had been busy for a week. A red flannel shirt flagged the breeze from a solitary poplar twenty yards away. Occasional pieces of hardware suggested that at some time men had eaten in those parts. Where the shack had leaned its log shoulder against the cliff a jagged cut showed.

Red had gone forward to this narrow slice in the rocky wall and was examining it closely. "Here, Fonsby!" he cried in a voice of excitement.

The Englishman answered the call, followed by the others, Pilkins alone hanging back.

"I guess that's the vein we've been lookin' fer," Meekins said in a voice that trembled with excitement, as he put his palm on a glinting blue-gray vein

of metal six inches wide, which stood clearly defined in the compress of the duller toned rock.

"That's silver—smaltite, right enough!" Peloo declared, as he picked with his pocket knife at the vein.

"That's why you built the shack ag'in' the bank—to hide the vein!" Red snarled, turning to Pilkins, who stood in sullen anger, realizing that accident had disclosed the silver vein he thought safe hidden until the log walls of the shack would have rotted.

"Yes, boys, I guess that lead'll run into about all I ever want," Red continued in a hesitating voice; "but I don't know as I feel jus' like whoopin' her up. I guess there ain't no chance that Spot hung together when the shot ripped a hole in the ground like that." Red turned away and took a circle of the yawning pit, casually picking up bits of wreckage, and when he came back his voice was steadier. "I guess I'll put a kind of little mark of silver somewhere about here, with Spot's name on it. Guess it wouldn't seem too foolish, 'cause I got awful fond of that dog."

V

BILLY

Silver City had the juvenile characteristics of a sprawling pup blinking with wondering eyes upon a newly discovered world. Six months before, Foghorn McLean had found a big vein of silver in this wilderness fifty miles from Cobalt, and now the plentitude of rock and trees had its primeval contours thrown out of joint by the aggressive squares of logshacks and canvas tents.

Trout's Hotel was distinctive in its individuality. It was of progressive architectural design. Against a central log building lighter board structures leaned with confiding faith in the stability of the parent abode.

Red Meekins had just eaten a hearty dinner in Trout's after two weeks of toil and lean fare out on his new claim, the Big Pine, and, as he drew a chair up beside the host, Peloo Trout, in the front room that was office and almost everything else, he felt like one who had returned to his own fireside.

"How's tricks, Peloo?" he asked conventionally.

"Business is hummin'," Trout answered.

"I knowed it would be when I heerd you had staked this hotel," Red declared.

"Help's the worst," Peloo growled. "There's a

Swede come in with his fam'ly, an' I got his girl to sling hash. The Chink cook's purty good too."

"Better than minin'," Red observed. "Bunkhouses is sure winners in a new camp."

"Bunkhouses p'r'aps is, Red," there was both asperity and reproach in Peloo's tones; "but the way I feed guests there ain't much in it—not when they been workin' out on claims for a couple of weeks, leastwise."

Red puffed at an ill conditioned cigar he had been struggling with, looked meditatively at the ceiling, and, not readily finding a happy retort, asked at a tangent, "How's Billy Forbes doin'? Holding down his job purty good?"

Peloo turned his face, allowing his eyes to rest in a long, contemplative gaze upon a slender, dark eyed man who stood behind a rude counter in a corner of the room talking to one who leaned with a suggestion of insolence in his whole poise against the plank that separated them. The slender man's face was strikingly pleasant to look upon,—frank, open, the suggested weakness of the lower part somewhat balanced by lines indicating a development of character out of experience.

"Billy seems quite to home," Meekins spoke in the way of recalling Peloo's attention to his question.

"Billy's done fu'st rate since he took holt," Trout answered. "How'd he come to leave Big Jake's j'int in Cobalt an' come here with you, Red?" Peloo's question was asked carelessly; but his eyes

looked into Meekins's with a shrewd interest quite at variance with his assumed tone.

"He was boss hash slinger in the dinin' room at Big Jake's, an' he was that perlite an' obligin' I took a shine to Billy," Red answered vividly.

"Oh, jus' come along 'cause you like him, eh?"

"Not exactly, Peloo. I knowed you was buildin' this here bunkhouse——"

"It's a hotel, Red."

"An' was like to get busy with brokerin' mines again," Red continued, ignoring the interruption, "an' I figgered Billy was jus' the kind of a kid to manage this part of your enterprises."

"An' he come," Peloo summed up.

"Not at fu'st; he just laughed at it. But I guess somethin' must have gone wrong the night before I pulled out for here. I was kinder lit up that night, havin' a few drinks with the fellers, so I don't know what it was; but early in the mornin' Billy comes to my room an' says he'll go. He says he'll meet me on the train goin' down to Latchford, where I've got my outfit in a canoe to come up the river."

"Kinder funny, wasn't it, Red? He didn't touch Big Jake for nothin', did he?"

"Say, Peloo, I thought you'd seen enough of men in your time to know a bear from a groundhog."

Peloo shifted uneasily in his chair, feeling the shame of Red's reproach, and added apologetically, "Billy don't look like a crook. I guess he's on the level, right 'nough."

"He was jus' scared that mornin', scared of some-

thin' or somebody; but when anybody's got a claim that Billy's done him up he can have half the Big Pine from me, an' it's lookin' purty promisin' at that," Meekins declared sturdily.

"I ain't findin' no fault with him, Red, an' all the fellers is down to the las' plunk on Billy. When they get a bit fresh all he's got to do is go among 'em with that little grin of his an' say, 'Boys, don't be too noisy, please.' Danged if there ain't somethin' in that soft voice that kinder acts like a poultice!"

"That's jus' what got onto me, Peloo—that danged voice of his. Do you know what I figger it like?"

"No."

"Onct I went to a circus. There was a girl in the lion's cage, an' when she talked to them cranky cusses jus' like that they'd quit every time."

"But sometimes a mean cuss of a lion gets rusty an' the girl can't do nothin' with him."

"I've heerd that too."

"Well, d'you see that galoot with the black moustache?" Peloo indicated with a move of his thumb the man who was talking to Forbes.

"Looks like a card sharp," Red declared after a minute's inspection.

"Well, that's him," Peloo growled.

"What him was you alludin' to, Peloo?"

"Why, the mean cuss in the cage of lions."

"Why don't you fire him? You never was stuck on the serciety of anybody you didn't like, Peloo."

"If it wasn't for Billy, I'd bounce him in a holy minute."

"Guess you'll have to deal some more talk, Peloo, afore I can ketch on."

"Well, this feller—Dick Hanson is his name—he comes here about two weeks ago, an' Billy knowed him, leastwise he knowed Billy, 'cause I kinder think Billy'd like to've got out of it. My idee is that he stands in with 'em two I-talians that's runnin' the blind pig up on the hill. Since he come there's been whisky in the house more'n onct, an' that'll kill me off deader'n a door nail."

"About the license, Peloo?"

"Yes. I got some friends at headquarters workin' to get a license here; but if it gets talked about that there's liquor in the house an' no license, I jus' don't get it, that's all."

"Did you speak to Billy about him?"

"Yes, sure I did. But, say, there's somethin' wrong. If you'd seen the look that came in Billy's eyes when I wanted to have that crook run out of town—it was jus' as if I'd sprung a ghost on him."

"Well, I'll gamble Billy never done nothin' crooked in his life. He's all wool an' a yard wide, you can stake your life on that, Peloo. Them eyes is his sworn testimony to that fact."

"What does Billy give him money for, Red? Billy's keepin' him."

"Didn't you never lend a pal money, Peloo?"

" 'Tain't the same, nohow; I jus' staked a feller that I liked. An' Billy don't cotton to this feller;

he's jus' feared of him. I been takin' stock when they wasn't lookin'."

"I reckon the proper thing to do under the circumstance," Meekins said thoughtfully, tousling his mop of red hair, "would be to snake this deadbeat some dark night an' send him scootin' down the river in a canoe with strict orders to keep goin'."

"Can't be did. This camp ain't no good." Peloo gasped, realizing he had expressed an adverse opinion of Silver City. He hastened to explain, "I mean as to governin' a place. We ain't got law enough, an' we got too much. If we had the right kind of law here we could jus' send this feller out as a vag, an' if Hank Speers hadn't been sent here as a no good constable, me an' you an' a few of the fellers could jus' give that sponge his choice between leavin' an' climbin' a tree without touchin' the trunk."

"Well, as for me," Red growled, "if Billy's gettin' the worst of it, I'll take the law inter my own hands an' wallop seven kinds of daylight out of that cowbird."

"We jus' got to wait an' stand for it awhile," Peloo said with a sigh of resignation. "I've seen fellers like that sorter get runnin' loose in a minin' camp, an' stumble up ag'in' a sickness that carried 'em off. You see, long's he pays his board an' don't break nothin', I kinder can't turn him out. I've been readin' up a lawbook on the subjec'. If I have any kind of a rumpus in the hotel, I'll lose a chance of gettin' that license, don't you see, Red?"

Red adjusted his leather coat by the lapels with a decisive jerk, indicating that he had made up his mind to something, before he said, "You jus' leave that fish to me, Peloo. I'll get onto his game."

"What's the idee, Red?" Peloo queried.

But Meekins only nodded his head sagaciously and drew himself out of the chair, saying, "Guess I'll hike off home to the Big Pine."

As the days passed, with Peloo sitting tight on the situation, it was evident to others that the presence of Dick Hanson was a menace to Billy's peace. The genial smile that had won all their hearts flitted feebly across his lips and only at rare intervals. Many scowling looks followed Hanson as he walked about idly, making a pretense of looking for a claim to buy.

There was an illicit whisky place up on the hill; but it would have been counted an act of treachery to denounce the blind pig. The miners considered the Government regulation against the sale of liquor in a mining camp an act of tyranny, sneering at the assertion that dynamite and whisky made an unsafe combination. They were men who could toy with liquor or dynamite, not babes to sup at a Government milk bottle. And it was generally believed that Hanson was associated with the two Italians who ran the blind pig.

Strangely enough, as it appeared to Meekins's friends, he was often observed in Hanson's company. When Peloo questioned him about this Red drew his shaggy eyebrows down and assumed an air

of deep mystery. Importuned once, he replied almost savagely,

"You jus' wait! Guess I know what I'm doin'! I uster be a fire ranger for the Gov'ment, an' I never caught nobody by runnin' after 'em yellin' I was an off'cer."

There was no doubt that Meekins had some crude idea of ingratiating himself into Hanson's confidence in the hope of obtaining sufficient evidence to remove him from Billy's path. He might have succeeded—that is, in a different manner from which his success came—if it had not been for the blight of liquor that had been on him for years. He could go months without it, and then inebriation would smite him as hay fever or periodical malaria lays other men by the heels.

Perhaps the wily Hanson, more subtle than Meekins, had divined the latter's weakness; at any rate Peloo was horrified to see Red come into his place one evening hilariously jocund.

"Where did you get it, Red, in the name of heaven?" he queried, dragging Meekins to his own room.

But Red was like an Indian, considering it a rank act of treachery to disclose the source of illicit liquor. Peloo begged Meekins to tell him whether it was some of the incoming miners had brought it, or if the blind pig had furnished it.

Under the questioning Red, usually placid of temper, flew into a rage and flung from the hotel,

cursing Peloo for a leather headed priest of water blooded bigots.

Billy was in despair; for he had grown fond of Meekins. "He got it at the blind pig, Mr. Trout," Billy assured Peloo. "Don't ask me about it; I can't tell you. Why doesn't the constable close that place up?"

"Is it Dick Hanson?" Peloo asked.

"I can't tell you," Billy reiterated; "But make the constable go out at once and arrest those men and send them out of the country."

Peloo stared and clawed with huge fingers at his shaggy beard. There were tears in the vehement voice of the speaker, almost in the blue eyes, Peloo thought, as he turned away. He passed grimly out to the front room, tapped Hank Speers on the shoulder, and said, "Come outside, Hank, I want to see you a minute."

"Something's got to be did, constable," he continued when they were in the open. "You get Bill Slack, an' the three of us'll go out an' pull that j'int. This town ain't goin' to be put on the bum by no whisky runners that don't pay no license. You know where 'tis, an' you get busy, or there's goin' to be a new p'lice force here!"

In half an hour three men with rifles were silently climbing in the dark the path that wound up the poplar grown hill toward a little ravine where a small log shack nestled innocently in a copse of stunted pine. Where the path, skirting a huge boulder, dipped to the ravine, Peloo checked

Constable Speers with his hand on the latter's arm, and, speaking low, said:

"We best stalk this pirate gang kinder quiet an' ketch 'em in the act."

Speers put his rifle down against the rock, slipped his pistol belt round till the black butt of a heavy revolver showed conveniently in front, and unhooked a bullseye lantern that hung at his hip, saying, "I know them thieves' game. Soon's we squeak they'll dash the glim an' try to slip us in the dark."

Then in Indian file the three slipped, with the noiseless tread of men accustomed to woodpaths, down into the deeper gloom of the little valley. From the cavelike blackness of the pines a light blinked at them evilly, like a red eye. Once Peloo whispered:

"They're to home, right 'nough!"

They were now among the pines, the crisp needles beneath their feet giving forth whispering notes as though they trod on heavy silk. Peloo's rifle clicked as he pumped a cartridge from magazine to barrel. The same clicking noise passed from Peloo to Slack. The heavy stillness of the pine boughs was like a foreboding hush, as though the night held its breath in expectancy. Once the constable checked, and turning his face whispered in Peloo's ear:

"One of these cusses is a Greek, Petri, an' he's like a rattlesnake. I know him. If he draws a weapin I'm goin' to plug him."

"We'll go kinder easy at the fu'st with 'em," Peloo advised in whispered tones.

As Speers moved forward again the dead stillness was shattered by a fierce oath from the shack, twenty yards in front. Other voices joined issue, pitched high in anger. Involuntarily the men stood still in silent listening. "You skunk, to say that!" came booming singly from the general din.

"That's Red," Peloo whispered, leaning his chest against the constable's shoulder.

The heavy voice of Meekins was smothered by the knifelike tones of the Greek.

"We got to rush it! There's somethin' doin'!" Peloo advised.

As they ran forward they heard the clatter of chairs, the shuffling rasp of feet that carried men in strife.

Speers, plunging forward, threw his weight against the door. As it smashed inward there was the crash of an overturned table, a sudden blanketing of all light, the clinking note of splintering lamp glass, and then two darting tongues of crimson light, and the rasping bark of a pistol's death voice twice.

As Speers snapped the hood of his lantern and threw the blue barrel of his revolver forward, a man slipped drunkenly from the grasp of another and collapsed like a cloth doll, to sprawl grotesquely in a huddled heap on the floor.

The constable's voice rang out sharp and imperious, "Hands up! The man that makes a break dies!"

Two rifles thrust their lean brown necks into the room in silent emphasis.

Red Meekins reeled unsteadily from the centre of the floor, and leaning against the wall drew a heavy hand across his eyes in a dazed way. He was moaning, "My God, fellers!" He stared stupidly at the figure on the floor that had writhed over on its back, a little stream of vermilion red trickling from the hanging jaw. Just beyond, Petri the Greek and his swarthy, evil looking mate stood with uplifted hands, their vicious faces sallow with fear.

"That's Dick Hanson!" Peloo said as he took a step forward and peered at the figure.

"Who shot this man?" Speers demanded.

Neither the Greek nor his companion had anything to say.

"I didn't, boys," Red said in a dazed way. "I ain't got no gun."

"Here, Peloo, keep these two covered while I handcuff 'em!" Speers commanded sharply.

Next instant steel bracelets clicked on the uplifted wrists, and the constable slipped his hand dexterously round the waists and forms of the two men, saying, as he brought forth a revolver and two slim, glittering knives. "I thought so. You swine'll get what's comin' to you for this!"

Something in this snapped the tension of Red's nerves. He broke down and babbled like a whipped child. Peloo checked him roughly. His speech was profane and calculated to draw Red's attention from the matter of his present trouble.

"We got to get this feller down to the town's quick we can," Speers declared. "Here, Slack, yank that camp bedstead apart for a stretcher an' put Hanson on it! Then you an' Peloo an' Red shoulder it while I take care of these."

As Peloo thrust his strong arm beneath the wounded man, lifting him toward the stretcher, a pistol clattered to the floor from the nerveless fingers. "He had a gun, right 'nough," Peloo said, thrusting the weapon into his pocket. Then he turned savagely on Meekins, who still clung weakly to the wall. "Take hold of this stretcher, Red, and don't stand there starin' like a blasted ijut!"

Speers cut a loop from a tracking line that hung on the wall and, tying it to the handcuff that joined the whisky men wrist to wrist, said, "Now, move on, you murderin' thieves! If you make a bad break goin' down the trail consider yourselves dead! Come on, now, Peloo. I'll come back in the mornin' to seize this outfit," and he kicked viciously a heavy wooden box from which protruded the necks of sealed bottles.

Before him Speers drove his prisoners, a turn of the stout cord about his wrist, and behind, with no utterance, awed to silence by the thing they carried, Peloo, Red, and Slack walked, their feet finding the path in the heavy gloom. As they neared the hotel the constable checked, saying:

"I'll take the cusses to my shack an' let Kinney hold 'em down with a gun. I'll be up to the hotel

to look into this," and he put his hand on the stretcher.

"We'll go in the back way," Peloo said, "an' take this poor cuss to his room. You slip through the front, Red, an' get Doc Seton. Don't say nothin' to nobody.

The constable moved off with his prisoners, and again the bearers of the stretcher went forward, circled the sprawling buildings, and through the back entrance carried Hanson to his room.

As they put the limp form on a bed the young doctor entered with Meekins. The three waited in awed silence as Seton laboured over Hanson's inanimate form, the greatest of all verdicts hanging in the balance—life or death.

"He can't live," the doctor said presently, straightening up with a deep breath. "He's shot straight through the lungs. Not dead yet; but only a question of a few minutes."

Peloo suddenly sprang toward the door to bar the entrance of someone who had clutched its clattering hasp; but he was too late, for the door was pushed with swift violence past his outstretched arm. Billy, with face drawn and white, entered and stood for a second staring wild eyed at the other face so ghastly and wan on the pillow. Peloo put his huge hand gently on the intruder's arm to draw him from the room; but Billy, with a cry of agony, tore loose from Peloo's grasp and, throwing himself on his knees beside the bed, clasped the dying man's face in his hands, crying:

"Oh, my God! Dick! Dick! Speak! Don't die, Dick! It's Jeanette!"

Peloo closed the door and stood heavily against its pine boards, his great shaggy head drooped till the chin rested on his chest.

The doctor, putting his hand on the shoulder of the kneeling form, said softly, "I'm afraid it's no use. Don't——" He stopped, utterly at a loss for words.

A dead hush fell upon the room; no one spoke. Sobs ticked off the seconds as the sands ran out. Once the doctor took a step toward the kneeling one who wept, but Meekins drew him back. In impotence they kept a silent wait. Then Death must have turned the empty glass; the sobs ceased.

Billy rose and, turning her drawn face toward the men, said brokenly, "This man was my husband. I am—am——" Then her voice broke, choked by sobs.

Peloo coughed and said, "I guess there's nothin' can be did, doctor?"

"Nothing, Mr. Trout; not until we——"

"If nothin' can be did," Peloo resumed, "we best all go below an' leave Bil—Mrs. Hanson here. She's kinder shook up, I reckon." He turned toward Billy. "Red'll hang round outside the door, lady, an' when you want anythin' jus' call."

Stepping as though they feared to wake some sleeper, the men passed from the room and closed the door gently. Outside Peloo whispered to Meekins:

"I'll be back in a minute or two. I'm goin' down to that Swede's shack to get some women's clothes."

Red drew forth a roll of bills and, shoving them into Peloo's hand, said, "There's 'bout a hundred there. Buy the best he's got for Billy. It's all my fault. Oh, if I'd knowed Billy was a woman!"

"Billy never was a woman, Red!" Peloo's voice was like a snarl. "Look here, fellers, an' you, doctor! Billy hit the trail to-night for Cobalt, an' Hanson's wife she come up the river in a canoe a follerin' him. That's what Silver City's got to know in the mornin'. Ain't that right, fellers?"

"Give the Swede twenty-five dollars to keep his mouth shut about the clothes," Red added.

An hour later Meekins sat in Peloo's room. "I can ketch onto the whole thing now," he said, "Billy bein' a woman. That skunk, even if he was Billy's husband, was onto it that I was trailin' him all the time, an' he's doublin' on me. You see he got an idee I knew Billy was a woman, an' as we're great friends, and I liked Billy, that loon is jealous. I guess he framed it up with the Dagos to do me by tellin' 'em I'm goin' to blow on their blind pig. To-night we got inter a argyment, an' he says I'm too thick with Billy. You see, Peloo, I don't know Billy's a woman, an' says that me an' Billy is perty hot pals. He sneers 'bout somethin', an' I asks where he comes in, as it's gener'ly s'posed he's spongin' on Billy. This makes him heat up an' say somethin' not perlite, an' I swat him on his laughin' box. I see him draw a gun an' grabs him. Jus' as

you fellers bust the door a gun cracks, an' I don't know whether Petri tried to plug me an' got Hanson, or Dick winged himself tryin' to bore a hole in me."

"You wasn't to blame, Red," Peloo said soothingly, "an' that's all got to be fixed up in the court trial. But here's Billy——"

"Say, Peloo, we got to drop that name."

"I mean the widder," Peloo corrected. "Here's the widder got all the worst of it. She's broke—that snipe sponged all her wages—an' she won't want to live unprotected in the hotel, me bein' a bachelor. There's fellers jus' mean enough to talk; you know that, Red."

"We got to stake her somehow," Meekins declared after a little pause. "Billy—I mean the widder—is jus' the squarest, cleanest feller—I mean widder—that I ever come acrost."

"We jus' got to do it, Red," Peloo agreed. "Danged if I know how I'm goin' to run the Trout House without Billy."

"Say, Peloo——" Red hesitated and looked at Trout.

"What is it?" the latter asked carelessly.

"P'r'aps it don't sound in keepin' with the surroundin's, but there's only me an' you here, Peloo, an' somethin's got to be did——" Red hesitated again, and Peloo once more affirmed.

"Yes, we got to jus' put things right for the widder."

"It's kinder soon to talk about it; but couldn't it

sorter be arranged—— Why don't you marry the widder, Peloo?" Red fairly blurted this out, as though half afraid of his own utterance. Then he added flounderingly, "It would make the hotel respectable to have a missus hangin' about."

"I ain't never thought of gettin' married," Peloo answered; "besides, as you say, it's kinder soon. I'll own up to it that I think about as much of the widder as you do, Red, an' somethin's got to be did; but it's kinder soon—too soon. We best have the fun'ral fu'st."

"Yes. I guess we best give the little woman a hint not to worry about money, an' bury that skate that's brought all this trouble to Silver City."

The death of Hanson was the first that had occurred in Silver City, and no plot had been set aside as a burial place. This contingency had been entirely overlooked: now it was thrust prominently before the notice of the citizens. There was a gathering of this body to discuss the matter. It was Red Meekins who originated the plan that was finally adopted.

Peloo stated a possible trouble in the future over such cases. "If we jus' bury Hanson promiscuous like, some feller's sure to come along an' jump the claim. S'posin' a feller finds mineral close by, he'll want to stake an' go minin', an' the town'll have to dig Hanson up an' plant him some other place."

"There ain't nobody found mineral up on Boulder Hill yet," Red offered, "though more'n a dozen fellers has prospected it. We best stake a claim

of twenty acres an' jus' assign it over to everybody as dies in Silver City; then nobody can jump it. How's that, men?"

"Whose name'll you stake it in?" the constable asked. "You got to have a permit."

Red scratched his head reflectively. That was a puzzler. It was simply impossible to get, at present, the names of those who were going to die in the future. "Why can't we stake it in Dick Hanson's name? He's the first," he queried.

"That can't be did legally," Peloo declared judicially. "You can't stake in the name of a man that's dead, I know."

"I got a permit for forty acres left," Red declared presently. "I'll stake twenty acres on that, an' transfer it over to Billy—I mean the widder."

"That'll do fu'st rate," Peloo replied. "She can hold it in trust, so to speak. Then she'll know that nobody can never jump the claim an' make the town dig up her husband."

The difficult matter thus adjusted satisfied every one present; in fact, Meekins was congratulated upon the brilliance of his idea.

Ordinarily a funeral is unpicturesque in its dark solemnity; but the cortège that wound its slow way from the Trout House up Boulder Hill was strikingly out of the ordinary. There was not a single horse in Silver City, not a conveyance to be drawn by a horse if there had been one; so the body was placed on a rough prospector's toboggan, drawn by six train dogs. The ground being bare, progress

was more than conventionally slow. Everybody in Silver City followed this unusual hearse; everybody except Meekins and Slack, who were up in the newly staked cemetery digging a long narrow chamber to receive the body of the man who had created this strong ripple of excitement in the camp.

When the procession reached the place of burial they found Meekins in a condition of distress. He had selected a spot that promised a sufficient depth of clay; but perverse rock had met his pick and shovel, and the party found him labouring with perspiring brow in a trench barely two feet deep.

Peloo took in the situation with one scrutiny. "Gen'lemen," he began, "we got to try a fresh place. You never can make it without dynamite!" He turned with rough gentleness to Mrs. Hanson, adding, "I guess, lady, you'd best go back to the hotel, 'cause we got to dig again. It'll be jus' the same's your bein' here, 'cause we'll see that it's all correct."

"There's a danged vein of somethin' hard here!" Red growled, as he swung his pick viciously in resentment of his failure. The steel point buried itself in a mass of decomposed calcite and clung tenaciously as Meekins wrenched with his powerful arms at the handle. With a sudden loosening the pick broke away, carrying with it a slab of calcite, the snap of the strain throwing Red on his back. The mourners found it difficult to resist a smile of glee at Red's mishap.

The latter scrambled to his feet, grumbling at the cussedness of rock, and stood eyeing crossly the

part he had uncovered. Suddenly he stopped and ran his hand over the spot; then in feverish eagerness with his hat he brushed away the débris of earth. "Holy smoke, Peloo!" he cried excitedly next instant. "Here's a solid vein of silver four inches of it! It's a strike, I tell you!"

In his excitement Red had forgotten, for the instant, his solemn occupation of grave digger: he was oblivious to everything but the delicate gray metal of precious worth that spoke of riches.

It wasn't in human miners' nature to resist the call of a strike, and, shameful to relate, the men who a minute before had stood in dejection about the shallow pit now hopped eagerly into its hollow, like boys scrambling for a handful of tossed pennies. Meekins, as author of this discovery, stood back wiping the perspiration from his forehead, listening to the enthusiastic confirmation of his announcement. He was the first to remember the somewhat sacrilegious divergence.

"Gen'lemen," he said, with impressive solemnity, "there's a lady present, and a——" Red checked his utterance, and coughed apologetically; he had been going to say "a body." He stepped out of the trench, followed shamefacedly by the others.

"Things is kinder diff'rent," Peloo said. "We're terrible sorry, Mrs. Hanson, that the depositin' of your late husband is not so agreeable as it should orter be."

"Oh, please do—do—— I don't blame you. It can't be helped; but——"

Red spoke up in relief to the agitated widow. "As Peloo said, lady, you best come along with me back to the hotel." He turned to the group of men. "So's to prevent any misunderstandin' over this strike an' our neglected dooty, this claim was staked on my permit, all legal an' accordin' to law, an' also I guess I'm the man that made the strike."

Red was interrupted by a bustle of discontent, a cough or two from the men; even Peloo turned and looked at him half angrily. But he continued in an uneventful voice:

"What I was goin' to say is, said stakin' was done for Mrs. Hanson, an' that goes. This claim, an' all the silver therein, belongs to the lady as has met with so much sorrer. Gen'lemen, I jus' ask you to agree to that as witnesses."

Peloo held out his big paw, saying, "Shake, Red!" He was followed by the others, each one grasping Red's hand in solemn appreciation.

"The transfer papers'll all be made out proper an' accordin' to law, an' the claim'll be recorded in due course," Red added with a great burst of technical expression.

The widow, overcome by the strain of waiting and this sudden alleviating good fortune, burst into tears. Peloo nodded to Red and then down the hill, and Meekins, going awkwardly up to Mrs. Hanson said with rough tenderness:

"I guess we'd best get back to the hotel. You're mighty tired."

The group of men watched the two go slowly

down the hill on the little trail, and presently Peloo spoke. "Well, fellers, we got to finish this job. Red's—well, Red was always square; this don't count nothin'. An' as for the husband here, I guess it's about the fu'st an' las' time that he ever done that little lady a good turn."

VI

FOR SAVING LIFE

THE front door of Trout's Hotel stood assailed by turmoil. Without, the wind carried the wail of hard driven snow and fretted the iron hasp until it clattered like an irritated castanet; within, Black Angus and Toady Downs frisked in a jocund scrimmage with Blair of New York.

Blair had brought the essence of hilarity with him, Peloo Trout knew; for his little bar in one end of the room was only a blueprint of what a bar should be, the shelves supporting only the most innocuous kind of fluid.

"That's what I get!" Peloo remarked dejectedly to Bill Slack. "Them fellers buys their liquor some other place, an' come here to get drunk. The other man makes the profit on their booze, an' all I get is their fool hossplay. I won't get no license till we put in another Gov'ment."

"It's a danged awful night!" Slack said, with a shiver of his shoulders. "I pity any poor cuss that's on the trail."

The front door swung open viciously, as though driven by the unseen hand of the storm which now sent a sworling blast of snow through the open gap.

"Blast that door, anyway!" Peloo growled, rising. "I got a new ketch to it."

He stood for a second peering at the storm's ghost dance; then with an exclamation he disappeared, only to thrust his shaggy head back into the room and say, "Give us a hand, Slack. There's another galoot here loaded for bear. Where in thunder all this booze is come from beats me!" The significant tone of reproach in Peloo's voice was intended for the roisterers.

There was a toboggan just beyond the one step, and across it sprawled a man who had evidently fallen backward from the door as he pushed it open.

"Take holt!" Peloo ordered curtly.

"Hanged if there ain't two of 'em!" Slack ejaculated as they lifted the fallen one to his feet, disclosing a second figure buried beneath a mound of blankets in the sled.

"Let's run this boozer in fu'st!" Peloo commanded.

Their en masse entrance appealed to Black Angus. "That's the way to run a hotel, Peloo," he declared. "Always carry the drunks in—they gener'ly throw 'em out."

"Dreadful state of inebriation," Blair of New York declared reproachfully.

Then they all laughed.

"He ain't got much start, I guess," Peloo parried dryly. "You fellers'll soon ketch up."

At that instant Slack gave a cry of discovery. "By hoky! Peloo, it's Red Meekins!"

"Then he is drunk, if it's Red," Black Angus offered.

"He's froze, boys," Peloo declared, putting his nose to Red's breath. "No liquor there—he's jus' plumb starved with the cold. Here, you men, quit your foolin'! There's another out in the sled. Bring him in! We got to thaw Red out purty quick."

"Here's something, boss," the New Yorker said, passing Peloo a flask.

"Lug him up to the stove," Black Angus advised.

"An' see his fingers drop off to-morrer if they're froze!" Peloo sneered.

He slipped Meekins into a chair, allowed some whisky to trickle down his throat, and watched its effect. Red gasped; then he coughed and stretched his arms wearily. His eyes opened and he looked at Peloo and the others wonderingly.

"You're all right, Red," Peloo said reassuringly; "but you'd a froze stiff as the North Pole if we hadn't found you."

Meekins answered something; but his voice, hoarse through weakness, was drowned by a scuffling rasp of feet as Slack and Toady entered carrying the other salvaged one. They placed him in a chair, where he sat blinking vaguely out of dulled eyes.

"Danged if I know him! But he ain't soused neither," Peloo declared as he eyed the second man.

"I best take off your mitts, mister," Slack said.

As he grasped a hand the man gave a cry of pain.

"Froze!" Slack commented, adding, as he per-

sisted, "I'll take 'em off easy. They got to come!"

As he gently drew the woolen mitten from a hand as useless and devoid of power as a doll's, it fell idly into the man's lap, a thing of swollen blackness.

"My God, men! This feller's got——"

Slack's cry of horror was cut by Red's voice, saying, "Moody got a frostbite comin' in. Wisht you'd put him in a bunk, Peloo."

Peloo bent his big shoulders to the level of Moody's sallow face and asked quietly, "Are you sick, stranger? Feelin' purty bad?"

Thick parched lips set in the coffee coloured face muttered something. Peloo felt Slack touch him on the arm, and as he raised his head the latter whispered in his ear. Peloo's swarthy face blanched. He drew back, and Slack, holding up his left hand, said in a low voice:

"Red's lyin' to us about it bein' frostbite. It's scurvy! I never'll forget the trademark, 'cause I been there."

"What's the matter, Peloo? Why don't you give Moody a bunk an' get Doc Seton to fix up his froze fingers?" It was Red's voice, weak and querulous. He had pushed in between Slack and Trout.

"I ain't got a single room left, Red. Business is hummin' an' the hotel is plumb chock full," Trout answered.

"You haven't a room!" Blair of New York interrupted. "If that guy is soused, let him sleep on the floor; but if he's sick, you can have my room."

Peloo looked admiringly at the speaker. "That's purty han'some of you, Mr. Blair," he said, "an' if I called you down when you was enjoyin' yourselves I guess it don't go no more. We'll jus' take this poor cuss up to Mr. Blair's room, Slack, an' when Doc Seton comes in—he's gone out to sew together a man that's monkeyed with some dynamite—we'll get him to work on this case."

Meekins put his hand on Moody's shoulder, saying, "The fellers'll put you to bed, an' Doc Seton'll be here in a minute to fix you up. You're all right now, Jack. We did purty good to make Peloo's instead of Heaven." Red added to Peloo, "I guess I can go up with Jack. I ain't eat nothin' for two days, an'——"

"I'll help with the sick man," Blair offered. "You get one of those rubber tired steaks cremated, Mr. Trout——"

"Say, young man——" Peloo's angry retort was cut by a sudden memory of Blair's gift of the room. He turned to Red instead, and said with heavy sarcasm, "If you'll step inter the dinin' room, Mr. Meekins, I'll pervide the bes' meal of victuals to be had north of New York. An' you won't get poisoned with bad oysters, same as I did in New York time I sold the Beaver Dam mine."

When Peloo emerged from the dining room again Slack, Black Angus, and Blair were seated about a box stove loaded to the muzzle with birch, which snarled and snapped as though miniature demons were holding a riotous revelry within.

"Doc Seton come in jus' now, an' I sent him along up," Slack advised.

"I guess Red ain't eat none for more'n two days, an' mighty little for a long time before that," Peloo said with a dry cackle.

"He must have had an awful trip. I'd like to hear his story," Blair observed.

"Guess you'll have to take it out in likin'," Peloo retorted. "Red don't talk much about himself 'less he's boozed—then he's the feller that licked John L. Sullivan wunst, accordin' to his own tale."

A little hush fell over the group as Meekins entered. Blair looked curiously at the man who had been thrown up at their door by the blizzard night and had fallen there, close to the edge of death. Peloo's hint about the loosening effect of liquor upon Red lingered in Blair's mind, and he tendered his flask, saying:

"Have a nip, mister. You deserve all that's going."

Peloo, who knew the slow, suspicious trend of Red's mind when he was being drawn to talk, began far afield. "Did you find that gold, Red, that Tommy Kazoo had all figgered out he could put his thumb onto?"

A mirthless laugh issued from Meekins's swollen lips. "I guess that halfbreed had a dream, Peloo; leastwise I didn't find nothin'."

"Have a cigar, mister," Blair offered, passing his case across the stove.

Meekins shook his head dolefully, saying,

"Thank you kindly; but I guess my lips is too swelled up with the cold to hang onto a weed.

"Try another nip," Blair persisted, hungering for Red's story.

Meekins turned his eyes on Peloo. Their imploring look caused the latter to say:

"I guess you deserve it, Red; it'll kinder thaw you out." Peloo was meaning loquaciously; but Meekins after a hearty draft ejaculated:

"That goes right to the spot. I can wiggle my toes now."

"An' you didn't find no gold?" Peloo suggested. "How was it you happened to be hooked up with Moody?"

"He was keepin' a Gov'ment cache up ter Moose Crossin'. His father's one of the Gov'ment big guns."

"If Moody's father is like the Gov'ment, he ain't no good!" Peloo snarled.

"You ain't got your license yet, eh, Peloo?" Red queried innocently.

"I ain't; but I wasn't thinkin' of that. There's other things this north country is gettin' all the wu'st of it over."

"How did Moody get scurvy?" Blair asked the question abruptly.

Red scowled. There was something disagreeable in the other's harsh wording of the dread disease. "There ain't no gold up there, Peloo," he said irrelevantly, in reproach to the other's inquisitiveness.

"Gold in this country," Slack remarked sententiously, "is jus' kidneys in the rock; fatter'n a ham for jus' a mouthful, an' then peters out same's somebody had stole it."

"Where's Tommy Kazoo an' the dogs?" Peloo asked.

"The dogs is dead. Wisht I could say the same about Kazoo!" Red snarled. Then he lapsed into an aggravating silence.

Peloo could read his own whetted interest reflected in the faces of the others. There was sarcasm in his voice as he said, ostensibly addressing Blair, "Red's goin' to write a novel some day. Guess he's savin' up this story 'bout how he had to eat up his dogs."

It was Peloo's solemn manner perhaps more than his words that caused Blair to laugh so heartily that Red, angered, snapped, "I didn't say I eat my dogs!"

Blair tendered an intrinsic apology. "Have another nip, Mr. Meekins?" he suggested.

As Red complied, Peloo leaned toward Blair and stage-whispered, "Red's terrible bashful. He's afeared we'd think he was blowin' if he told how he sledded that poor sick cuss all the way from Moose Crossin'—that's about two hundred miles."

"It's only a hundred an' eighty," Meekins corrected.

"How d'you come to go to Moose Crossin'? You was on Black River," Peloo queried, with a wink at Blair, as much as to say, "Now we're off!"

The last drink had evidently overcome Red's repugnance to speak of his own deeds, and he fell into the trap. "I knocked about with that fool breed, Tommy Kazoo, huntin' that yeller mountain he talked about, till my grub got low. Some Indians told me the Gov'ment had a cache of grub at Moose Crossin' for the survey parties that was out runnin' railroad lines."

"A man might as well meet a flock of sandhill cranes as Indians—they ain't never got no grub," Peloo interposed.

"They agreed to feed Tommy till I got back with grub," Red continued; "so I lit out for Moose Crossin' with my dogs. That took two days, an' when I got there—— Say, boys, it was tough! Moody is in bed——"

"I know," interjected Slack. "I been hooked up with scurvy. His sand was all leaked out. He jus' quit an' wanted to die, didn't he, Red?"

"Purty near. He was eatin' raw pork an' drinkin' beer. His mate had gone off two weeks before to get medicine, an' Moody allowed that mos' like he was on a big drunk somewhere, 'cause he was that kind."

"Didn't they have any potatoes?" Peloo asked. "Raw potatoes would've cured him better'n any medicine."

"Or lime juice," Blair offered.

"I guess there ain't no limes growin' up in that country," Red retorted, "an' as for potatoes, Peloo, they let 'em get froze. I see some tenderfeet in

my time; but Moody an' the feller that had been with him was artists in that line. They'd never done nothin' but book learnin' an' football an' things, an' I guess they'd been shipped up to Moose Crossin' to separate 'em from booze for a time. Anyway, Moody didn't know what was ailin' him. His legs was as black as my hat, an' is still. When I told him he'd got to get out along with me he blubbered like a kid; said he was too sick. He took a potshot at me with a gun he had under his pillar when I went to yank him out of bed to get ready. My dogs is kinder used up with hard goin'; but I see I got to get that kid to a doctor purty quick, so I pulls out for here next mornin', thinkin' I can make it in ten days at most, an' havin' his weight in the sled I don't take none too much grub."

"It's been forty below here most the time," Peloo slipped in.

"Yes, it were fifty the day I pulled out, an' I driv', driv' at the dogs for fear the January thaw might come after that snap. In two days we make sixty miles. Slow goin' that; but the snow is deep. Then she melts on the third, an' freezes up tight that night. That left a crust on the snow—jus' enough for the dogs to go through an' cut their feet same as they was walkin' on broken glass. I'm goin' through half the time, 'cause my snowshoes ain't none too big. Say, them dogs jus' cried, an' when they wasn't whinin' Moody was blubberin'; wanted to know why I couldn't let him die comf'table up at the shack—not bring him out there to freeze to death."

"A pleasant trip you had!" Blair commented, simply as a valve for escape of tension.

"It was kinder tough," Red admitted. "I ain't stuck on husky dogs none too much as pets; but I'm danged if it didn't hurt some to have to shoot two the fifth day out. But they'd a died anyway. I couldn't leave 'em no grub, an' they couldn't go on. In six days the dogs was all gone. We hadn't made more'n a hundred miles when the las' pegged out—an' he wasn't much good at that. I was in the collar ahead of him, an' sometimes I'd look round an' find I was pullin' dog an' sled too."

"How long was you comin', Red?" Peloo queried.

"Eighteen days."

"It was an awful trip," Slack declared.

"Sometimes, to tell you the truth, fellers, I'd kinder lose my nerve," Red admitted.

Peloo's eyes turned on Meekins sharply, questioning the truth of this statement. A pleased relief crept into them as Red added, after a little pause:

"I'd look at that poor cuss lyin' by the campfire, an' think he was about all in. I don't know how I'd a felt if I'd not landed him here—that after blowin' to him so much about gettin' him here sure."

"You wasn't worryin' none about yourself, Red, I guess," Peloo offered, so that the man from New York might understand.

"There wasn't nothin' to worry about, only bein' tired," Meekins answered simply. "When a feller's well he can always take care of himself, can't he? I was that danged near bushed, though, toward the

last that I was feared I might go right on sleepin' an' Moody'd peg out on me. I uster tie a cord about my hand an' make the other end of it fast to his arm—'cause his fingers was no use—an' tell him to yank the daylights out of me if he wanted me to get up or if it was time to start. Grub was gettin' purty low too; last two days I guess I kinder lived on chewin' tobacker altogether. I made Moody go on hospital treatment—what I'd call tea an' a promise. I knowed it was drinkin' coffee an eatin' pork that had scurvied him, 'cause fellers that live in the bush an' drink tea five times a day never get no scurvy."

"Well, you saved his life, Meekins," Dr. Seton, who had joined the circle, declared emphatically. "He'll pull through, perhaps minus a foot; his toes will go sure. You ought to get the medal for saving life after going through so much for a stranger."

"Guess the fellers'd laugh if they seen me with a medal on my chest; an' as for bringin' him out, I was about sick of winterin' up there anyway. Danged if I ain't glad I'm back here! Seein' ole Peloo an' his whiskers is about wu'th that walk."

"What about the dogs you lost, Red? Who's goin' to pay you for them?" Trout asked.

"The Government ought to pay for the dogs," Dr. Seton asserted.

Peloo snorted in derision. "When I get a license Red'll get his dog money," he said. "Red ain't got no more pull than I got. If dogs had votes, then

Red would have six bran' new dogs bought for him at wunst."

"I guess I didn't think nothin' about gettin' paid for my dogs at fu'st," Meekins interposed, "an' when I see a white man jus' peggin' out inch by inch I guess I'd brought him in if I knowed I'd never get a cent!"

"You trip is like a story I read last month of two men in a blizzard—only they went snow blind," Blair observed as Meekins ceased speaking.

"Them story fellers gener'ly gets the wu'st of it," Red said dryly. "They get cracked heels, and bunged eyes, an' froze feet, an' have to chaw dog harness for a livin', an' get saved the las' minute by a miracle so's they can go into the lecture business. But I never come acrost much of that tough luck. Of course I'm not stuck on takin' as a steady job pullin' a sled with a half loony cuss in it. Guess I'll turn in, Peloo, if I can get a shakedown," Red declared after a little pause. Then his eyes wandered humorously about the group, and he added, "You fellers strung me for a lot of talk, an' some of it don't go as facts."

As Meekins rose to follow Peloo, who stood with a lighted candle in his hand waiting, Blair held out his hand, saying, "You can't kid me with that bluff. You're a peacherino man, all right, and if you ever come to New York we'll trail up the Great White Way together a few, I guess."

When Peloo set the candle on a washstand in the room he had led Meekins to, the latter turned on

him angrily with, "Peloo, you've give me your bunk! Where you goin' to roost, eh?"

"I got my blankets spread in Moody's room. You don't think I'm goin' to let a feller you're fool enough to lug in here sick keep that girl waitin' on him all night so's she can't carry hash to the boarders to-morrer, do you?" Then with an emphatic bang of the door Peloo clanked down the bare wooden stairs.

The next day Moody was sent out by sleigh trail to the train at Charlton on his way to a hospital at Toronto.

"You've made a strike, Red," Peloo assured Meekins. "It'll be wu'th thousands to you, savin' that kid. You'll get in with 'em big guns. You can pick up a claim here for most nothin' an' float a company, just by lettin' 'em have a big rake-off. I'll help you do it; for I guess I got a little more experience at brokerin' mines."

"I'd like to get paid for 'em dogs, if it's all the same to the Gov'ment," Red offered as a more practical prospect.

"That ought to be as easy as rollin' off a log," Peloo affirmed; "that is, if this Gov'ment isn't bigger hogs than a camp of halfbreeds. What you got to do is make out a bill for savin' Gov'ment property."

"Could you call a man Gov'ment property, Peloo?"

"In makin' out a bill, of course. It's like writin' for value received—same sort of thing. A Gov'-

ment don't care a hang about a man 'cause he's a human bein': it's jus' because he was part of the works to put through that railroad—see?"

"You write it out, Peloo. My fingers is that danged stiff with the cold an' haulin' that sled I guess I'd make a bad fist of it."

Peloo complied with alacrity. He brought forth paper which carried as a letterhead the legend, "Peloo Trout & Co., Mining Brokers." Peloo put his finger on this lettering and said impressively, "That'll give it a kind of standin', Red. I'll write it actin' as your agent. That'll make 'em kinder sit up an' take notice. Them dashed clerks is too handy at turnin' down a man that don't seem to have connections. Fu'st we'd better make out the bill. What's the four dogs wu'th?"

"They wasn't much—picked 'em up; 'bout five dollars a tail, I guess."

"Four dogs, at say, twenty-five dollars apiece: that's a hundred."

"Say, Peloo, d'you s'pose any of 'em fellers at headquarters knows anythin' about the value of train dogs?"

"I guess they know more about ortomobiles.. Hundred dollars for four dogs, I've writ. Now your time, Red."

"Goin' to put that in too? I wasn't hired to bring that poor cuss in; I jus' did it."

"Don't make no diff'rence—you done it. You was eighteen days, wasn't you?"

"Yes."

"An' six days to recover from the turrible exposure; that makes twenty-four days, at ten dollars *per diem*—two hundred and forty dollars net."

"But, say, Peloo, they're sure to know a man only gets three dollars a day up here."

"For blastin' rock; but that price don't go when it comes to savin' lives an' Gov'ment property. What's the Gov'ment for? Don't everybody soak 'em when they get a chanst?"

"They won't pay it," Red objected, "not ten dollars a day."

"I'm fixin' it," Peloo declared conclusively. "I'm writin' it this way: 'To hire of self and a train of dogs'—that's wu'th ten dollars."

"But I didn't have no dogs most of the time," Meekins corrected.

"That's jus' it—nor you ain't got no dogs to go back to finish your perspectin' for gold. I'm puttin' in two hundred dollars for loss of perspectin' while you was away on Gov'ment service."

Meekins drew a hand across his forehead and there was a bewildered look in his eyes. "Guess I can't keep up with you, Peloo, in that statement of account; there's too many figgers. How does she stand now?"

Trout made an addition, and then answered, "Five hundred an' forty dollars—not a danged cent too much!"

"Guess I best leave it to you, Peloo; but they'll chop it down some, I bet."

"That's what I'm allowin' for—ten per cent. off

for cash, so to speak. I'll write it out in official form' and send her in at wunst."

For thirty days Peloo and Meekins discussed daily the probable outcome of their claim for salvaging Moody. Then one day Peloo took Meekins to his room, saying, "I guess your check has arrove, Red; leastwise this looks kinder suspicious," and he held out a long white envelope which carried a red official seal.

"I hope they ain't cut it more'n about half," Meekins said as Peloo opened the letter.

"They jus' run it through the Gov'ment meat chopper, that's all they did, Red," Peloo answered dryly as he passed Meekins a check.

"Thirteen dollars an' twenty-five cents!" the latter read aloud in tones of deep disgust. "Cussed if I didn't eat up more'n that in tobacker! What does Premier Wilson say in that letter about it?"

" 'Tain't from the Premier, Red; it's from some danged understrapper who signs himself Secretary to the Dep'ty Minister of the Department."

Then Peloo proceeded to read the letter. The secretary pointed out that the Government should not be held responsible for four dogs which had evidently been lost through the owner's carelessness after his arrival at Silver City, as he had charged for their services up to that time, eighteen days in all.

The item of eighteen days in making one hundred and eighty miles was an overcharge. With a team

of ordinary dogs this distance should be covered in, at most, six days.

The item of two hundred dollars for loss to Mr. Meekins's business while absent appeared to be a claim without any foundation, as evidently said Meekins was on his way to Silver City when Mr. Moody engaged transportation.

The secretary was further instructed to advise that Mr. Moody was not authorized to engage Mr. Meekins, and it appeared to the D. M. that Mr. Meekins should obtain payment from Mr. Moody.

But as this matter of a Government employé's right to take sick leave in special cases without first applying to the head of his department was now under consideration, the D. M. had passed an order for the payment to Mr. Meekins of the regular Government rate of ten cents a mile for the hundred and eighty miles he had transported Mr. Moody, less four dollars and seventy-five cents, the value of food supplies he had obtained from the Government cache at Moose Crossing. A check for thirteen dollars and twenty-five cents was inclosed. Mr. Meekins would please sign the inclosed vouchers in triplicate.

"There you are, Red!" Peloo exclaimed ironically. "Paid in full for takin' a chanst of bein' froze to death to save a sucker, an' here's your diploma!" Peloo tendered the check with a Chesterfieldian air to Meekins.

Red gazed at the white slip in silence. A flush of humiliation reddened his brow. The flimsy bit of

paper seemed evidence that he had overrated this service, had bragged about it, in his demand for recompense.

"I'm kinder sorry I sent in that bill, Peloo," he said after a time. "I'd lose four dogs an' tramp a bit through the snow to save a white man's life any time. I orter've let it go at that, an' waited for my turn to be helped."

" 'Tain't that way at all," Peloo objected. "Isn't the Gov'ment always givin' pensions an' bonuses to men that puts in claims? But it's jus' because the fellers has got a pull—can switch votes. When I was up in Alberta, time the Riel rebellion, there was a halfbreed that uster pasture the Gov'ment transport hosses at five dollars a head per month. Along comes the rebellion, an' he hires the hosses to the Gov'ment at five dollars a day for each team. He got away with it too, an' jus' because all the halfbreeds voted the way he told 'em to vote."

"Purty slick," Red commented. "An' if it comes to the matter of a mine deal I guess I'd look out for myself too; but this is kinder diff'rent, Peloo! I orter been satisfied with savin' that feller's life as a saw-off to some wuss things I've did. I guess I'll jus' send that check back with my compliments to Gov'ment."

Peloo sat scowling at his toes, turning something over in his mind; then he said, "You give me that check, Red, an' I'll stake you to four of the bes' train dogs in the North."

"I don't want it, anyway," Red declared de-

spondently, as he passed the check back to Peloo. "You can give it to some poor people, if you like."

That evening when Meekins entered the hotel office room his eyes fell on his Government check, neatly framed in black, on the wall behind the bar. "For Saving Life" was written in red across the check. Below it was an explanatory note on a sheet of Peloo's business paper. The first line of this literary endeavour ran, "The value our Government puts on a man's life." Then followed a terse, graphic résumé of what Meekins had done, his loss in time and dogs. And as an envoy a sarcastic line: "Vote for this kind of a Government, men!"

Rather troubled, not quite understanding, Red turned away, to find Peloo looking at him with an amused grin on his shaggy face. Peloo nodded complacently, saying:

"I guess Gov'ment'll find you have got a pull, Red," he indicated the sombre framed check. "There's going to be an election in the spring. Shouldn't wonder if the Gov'ment candidate'd want to buy that check, Red."

From that day on the innocent looking slip of paper behind Peloo's bar grew in importance. It waxed into a power that dwarfed large questions of political economy. "What about Meekins's check," was a question suddenly shot at a political speaker sufficient to offset an hour's harangue.

"Meekins ain't got no pull, eh?" Peloo would observe ironically from time to time.

One night, two months after the receipt of Red's

check, a stranger arrived at Trout's Hotel. Peloo, who was behind the counter, noted with grim interest that as the man raised his eyes from signing the register they fell on the framed check and lingered there long enough to read its attached history.

The guest asked quietly, "Is this Mr. Meekins in Silver City now?"

"That's him, an' he's one of the mos' influential citizens of this town," Peloo answered, indicating Red, who was sitting by the stove.

As Peloo turned the register he gave a gasp and looked at the check behind him. It carried the same signature as that written in the book, "Peter Moody."

Moody had crossed over to Red. He held out his hand, saying, "I owe you a debt of gratitude sir, for saving my son's life. I am Mr. Moody."

"Oh, I jus' happened along," Red replied in a deprecating voice. "How's he doin', Mr. Moody? Did he lose all his toes?"

"He's crippled physically; but in other ways he's better than he ever was. As you saved his life, I can hardly regret the experience."

Moody drew from a pocket a small leather case, and added, "I brought with me a little token of my gratitude and appreciation, hoping I might find you here." He opened the case, lifted out a massive gold watch and chain, and passed it to Meekins with the back of the case open, saying, "When you've read what is inscribed there I hope you will accept this too meagre gift from me."

On the case of Meekins read, "Presented to James Meekins for his heroic conduct in saving the life of my son. PETER MOODY."

"I want to speak of that check on the wall," Moody said presently. "I have been away and know nothing of that matter. The check was signed by my deputy. It was only on my return that I had the story from my son's lips."

Meekins had sat reading over and over the inscription in the watch. There was a bur in his voice as he said, "Any of the fellers would've done all that I done, mister; but it's mighty nice of you to give me that watch an' what's writ in it. You mus' tell your son when you go back I hope he's gettin' on all right."

"I'd like to take that check back to the department," Moody said. I'd take the matter up myself."

"If you'll excuse me a minute, mister; I got to say a word to Peloo," and Red, stepping over to the counter, said, "Jus' hand me down that check, Peloo."

Trout complied, saying, "I knowed he'd want to buy it; but don't take no promises—get the cash. Stick him for all he'll stand!"

Meekins returned to his seat, saying, "I got kinder tired seein' that thing up there."

Moody hastily put a hand, crying, "Why, you are tearing it, Mr. Meekins!"

"Guess I am," Red answered quietly, " 'cause me an' you an' the Gov'ment is all quits now."

VII

HILLS OF THE WIND

A NEW organ in the sitting room of Peloo Trout's hotel indicated the full advancement of Silver City.

Red Meekins, who had come in from his claim, the Big Pine, sat in a chair beside the proprietor listening to the travail of the organ. Presently he turned to Trout and remarked, "That Singer Tomato is a hummer at the melojun, Peloo."

"That's a organ, Red. 'Tain't one of 'em hinky-dink melojuns," Peloo reproved with considerable asperity, "an' the gent that's workin' it ain't a vegetable—his name happens to be Señor Tomasso. He's a I-talian musicianer in the theatre."

"Where's that other I-talian was here, Peloo?" Red queried in the way of covering his defeat.

"Which one? There's such a slue of guests puttin' up at the Trout House now."

"Lamonte was his name."

"He was a Frenchy, an' he went out perspectin' for the Lost Mine. Leastwise I kinder got that give me on the side."

Tomasso had struck up "The Suwanee River" with its infectious swing, and a dozen voices took up the refrain in twelve separate keys.

During the turmoil Bill Slack and Toady Downs came in and took seats beside Red.

"There's been a feller shot up," Slack announced.

"Was he a white man or a Dago? Them Dagoes I always carvin' theirselves?" Red asked.

"Hank Speers has gone out for him," Slack answered. "I heerd it was that loony feller Lamonte, that was wild goose chasin' after the Lost Mine up in Keewatin Hills."

"Kinder queer about 'em hills," Peloo observed solemnly. "I don't take no stock in ghosts; but there ain't nobody monkeyed with that Lost Mine Injun story but what's got the wu'st of it. Big McLean got drownded in the Devils Pool lookin' for it, an' 'em two halfbreeds, Descoigns, they got shot up, an' nobody never knew how."

"Yes, there's a whole bunch of fellers killed, or broke a leg, or spent their last dollar an' never got nothin'," added Red.

"That's old woman's yarns!" Slack growled disdainfully. "I'd go up there in a holy minute if I thought there was any gold. There ain't nothin' up there, not even the evil speerits the Injuns tell about."

"Terrible purty name 'em hills has got," Red observed,—" 'Hills of the North Wind,' Injune for the same bein' Keewatin. Most too purty a name for a nest holdin' only goblins an' evil speerits."

The organ groaned dismally as Tomasso prepared for a fresh assault. When he had touched

their sympathies with "Starlight" and been carried off to receive his reward at the bar, Peloo said:

"Well, fellers, I wouldn't bet again' both propositions. Gold's been brung out of 'em hills, because I seen it, an' I'm danged if you could bribe the feller to go back again or tell where it was."

"Did he get scairt?" Red queried.

"He must've seen somethin'."

"Who was it, Peloo?"

"Felix Gouin."

"He's a French breed, an' I wouldn't believe one of that tribe on oath," Slack offered. "A breed would run a mile if an owl coughed in the dark. Guess that's what he heerd, an owl."

"Kinder think it was Gouin that put it into Lamonte's noodle to go huntin' for that Lost Mine," Peloo said reflectively. "They was thick as two thieves here for about a week."

"If he did, Peloo, an' Lamonte's been shot up, looks as if there was somethin' in the Injun's story about bad luck strikin' anybody that butts inter their fam'ly ghost business," Red suggested.

"They was both nutty," Slack sneered. "I see that Lamonte about here, an' I figgered he was off his chump. I wouldn't be afeared to go up inter 'em hills the darkest kind of a night."

"Danged if I would," Peloo declared emphatically, "an' I ain't afeared of anythin' that wears hair! I've heerd more'n one feller that was jus' as full of grit as you are, Slack, say they'd heerd some

dang queer noises in 'em hills at night when they was camped on Duck Lake."

"Talkin' of speerits," Red interjected, "there is a happy land not far away. Come on, boys, lets suppose that bar's the Keewatin Hills, an' take a fall outer 'em speerits."

"What about us gettin' back to the Big Pine? She's growin' late, Red," Slack asked.

"Soon's we've had a drink, Slack, you can slip out an' get the ponies, an' we'll hit the trail for the Big Pine," Red replied.

"You're boss, Red," Slack concurred with willing resignation.

"Better'n it uster be, Peloo, when we had to drink lemon pop," Red said, removing with the back of his hand a dew that lingered in the stubble of his rufus moustache. "Let's go an' hear Tomato—what d'you say his name was, Peloo?"

"I'll write it on your shirt cuff, Red."

"Only fellers in the hotel business can afford b'iled shirts," Meekins retorted. 'Em movable kind of cuffs you've got, Peloo, is fu'st rate where a feller's travellin' light as to his shirt."

Slack and Downs had laughed at Peloo's sally because he was master of the bar; because Red had stood treat they now laughed at his retort.

The hilarity was interrupted by the advent of Constable Hank Speers. He was dripping wet.

"It's an awful night!" was his first greeting. "Give me a pint of dryin' fluid, barkeep."

"Is she rainin', Hank?" Red asked foolishly.

"Rainin'! Do I look like it? It's a nice, lovely moonlight summer evenin', only Egg Lake an' the Montreal River is havin' a ketch as a ketch can wrastle up there in the valley, an' I got too clost." Then Speers turned to his revivifier with a quiet assumption that Red's foolish question had merited the reply courteous.

"Did you get that feller that somebody plugged?" Peloo asked.

"Yes, an' the feller what plugged him, too, I guess."

"Gouin! It was Lamonte was shot, wasn't it?

"Yes, an' I nabbed Gouin sence I come back. I guess you can help, Peloo. I want to use that feller that's havin' trouble with the pianner in there—Tommy. I'll tell you what I want, Peloo." The Constable drew a small sheet of paper from his pocket and spread it out on the bar, continuing, "I got this in Gouin's pocket when I dropped on him. You see 'em spots on it?"

"Looks like blood," Peloo surmised.

"I figger it is. An' that's music wrote on it, isn't it?"

Peloo scanned the paper intently, and then announced that it was music.

"Well, a breed don't carry music round with him as a reg'lar standby, an', there bein' blood on it, I figger Gouin took that outer Lamonte's pocket when he shot him. That's a thumbprint in the corner."

"Lamonte was all the time monkeyin' with the

organ, an' I see him one day makin' a plan of music on paper. Guess you're right, Hank."

"What did he want to kill a feller to get a bit of music for?" Red asked. "I heerd of a feller up north that shot a Scotchman for playin' the bagpipes; but that was kinder to get rid of music."

"You got me, Red," the Constable acknowledged in a perplexed manner; "I can't make it out, neither. But there wasn't nothin' else touched on Lamonte. He had a watch an' some money. He was jus' lyin' there in the pass leadin' into Keewatin Hills, lookin' as if he was asleep, an' there was a hole bored through him commencin' at his back."

"That's the way a halfbreed does his shootin', from behind," Slack declared.

"I was thinkin'," the Constable went on, "that it might be a good idee to get Tommy there to kinder size up this music that's wrote here."

"What for?" Peloo asked.

"I don't know exactly; but it's the only clue we got. I read a lot of detective stories, an' sometimes a feller's run to earth by a bit of paper—only clue they had too. If it's a letter, they get what they call a writin' expert, an' bein' music I guess Tommy there is the only feller in these parts that knows anythin' about it."
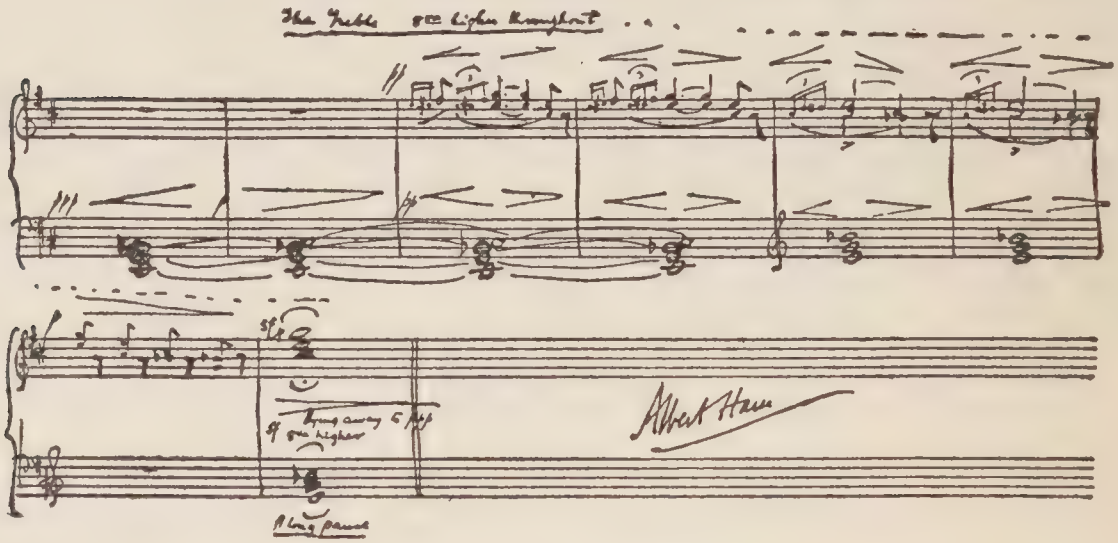
Peloo took the paper in his hand, saying, "I'll ask Señor Tomasso to see what he can figger up about it."

"I wouldn't say nothin' to him about where she comes from," Speer cautioned.

Tomasso looked at the music that Peloo handed him, assumed his most professional air, placed it on the organ, and ran a few notes with one hand. "Curious," he said, "I can't remember it. Think it's by Wagner."

"Lamonte was the gent's name," Peloo blurted out, then stopped suddenly in confusion at a sharp glance from the Constable.

"Don't think it," objected Tomasso. "I'll bet drinks for the house it's Wagner!" and again he made little tentative excursions up and down the keys with his fingers. "Listen to this, gents," he said finally, and with elaborate fingering he played:



Tomasso was a fair performer, also considerable of a poser; so he threw his whole capacity into the weird refrain. The organ wailed and reverberated. The barbaric quality of the music cut into the elemental nature of the men of the woods who listened, their imaginations probably quickened by the memory that the blood stained paper holding the score was now a tongued witness of murder—to the

slaying of the man who had lain out there in the moonlight as if asleep on the trail.

It was with a sighing relapse of breath that Red muttered as Tomasso wheeled from the stool, "Danged if that ain't as creepy as the bagpipes!"

Tomasso scowled. "Bagpipes!" he snorted. "Did you ever hear grand opera?"

"Guess I never heerd that feller play," Red admitted; "but you're purty good at it."

Tomasso's indignation fled at this flattery, and he smiled complacently at Red's mistake.

"Could you figger up anythin' out of that, Mr. Tommy?" the Constable asked.

"I don't understand," Tomasso said.

"Could 'em music things stand for words?"

Tomasso looked puzzled, not knowing of the paper's importance. In his perplexity he turned again to the organ and sang a wordless refrain to the score. Red and Slack caught themselves humming the weird refrain. It was creepy, as Red had declared.

"I'll tell you what it's like," Tomasso said, as he finished, "it's like a storm at sea shrieking through the rigging. It's what we call mad music, a seeking for something, trying to harness the turmoil to music."

"It's kinder like that," Peloo agreed.

"With some wolves throwed in, howlin' their level best," Slack added.

"Would you mind playin' it again, mister?" Speers requested.

"What're you tryin' to get out of it?" Peloo whispered.

"I'll put the screws on that breed an' see if I can't make him sing that same thing—see, Peloo? But I want to get kinder familiar with the rime of it."

When Tomasso had played the dirgelike thing for the third time, Red said, "That's the kind of music that drives a feller to drink."

"Bein' as you're so pressin', Red, don't mind if I do," Peloo said suggestively.

"It orter be on the house for harborin' the cause of complaint," Red proclaimed; "but Mr. Tomat—the musicianer has been mos' obligin' an' entertainin', an' my proposition goes."

They adjourned to the bar, and there was a round of drinks.

Then Peloo said, "The house now rises to the occasion to remark that it's ready to discharge its obligations. What'll you have, gentlemen?"

The Constable, as cause of the trouble, felt called upon to keep up his end; so that at the expiration of half an hour, Tomasso having gone back to the organ, the four friends were left somewhat in a mellow, confidential mood.

"I don't mind sayin', fellers," Peloo remarked, "that I've heerd that kinder dead march piece before." He looked with wise gravity at Speers and winked.

"That's what I was sorter drivin' at," the Constable observed. "Was it the Frenchman an' the breed?"

"It was," Peloo declared dramatically. "That danged breed would stand there a howlin' by the organ, an' Lamonte he's thumpin' the ivories an' scrawlin' somethin' on paper. See?"

"Makin' it up," Speers suggested, nodding his head.

"That don't prove nothin'," Slack objected. "They was both nutty. You fellers put me in mind of ol' women that, when they hear a dog howl, they say it's a sign somebody's goin' to die."

"Slack," Meekins put his hand on the last speaker's shoulder, "you go and get the hosses an' we'll pull out for Big Pine. I know it's stopped rainin', I feel so danged dry. I ain't goin' to get full to-night, 'cause I'm on the water wagon."

Meekins laughed foolishly as his foot missed the stirrup. "This black mud's so danged slip'ry!" he remarked as an extenuating explanation to Peloo and Speers, who stood in the doorway. At the next try he made it, and, lifting to the saddle, sang out, as the impatient horse lurched forward, "Good-night, boys. Hope Slack don't want to go up into the Keewatin Hills to-night."

As the horsemen swung to the trail from Silver City, the cupping hoofs beneath them driving up a spray of soppy mud, Slack uttered in staccato gasps, "Guess—it's stopped rainin'—'cause—the supply had run out."

"Must've come down to beat Noah's big storm," Red added.

A huge moon leered at the riders complacently

from over the tree softened outline of Keewatin Hills as their horses ate into the westward trail at a pounding gallop. The two men had lapsed into the silence that comes with sleeping Nature's hush. Where the trail swept the base of Keewatin Hills with the curve of Eugene's cimitar, suddenly loomed, like a cavern door, dark and forbidding, the Devils Pass.

"That's where Lamonte got hisn," Red said.

Fifty yards beyond, Slack muttered, "Comes of hookin' up with a breed. He orter knowed better'n to travel with one of that kidney."

Another half-mile, silent but for the rubberlike pound of the hoofs, and with a snort of affright, Red's horse stiffened his fore legs, swerved, and then stood still, throwing his head irritably up and down, the bit clanking against his set teeth.

Meekins was diligently trying to recover his equilibrium.

"Danged if the bridge ain't gone!" Slack declared. "Black Water's chewed it up, that's what it's done!"

Meekins looked with angry reproach at the surging flood which had swept away the primitive wooden bridge. "Well, I'm dashed!" he growled. "How're we goin' to get to the Big Pine now?"

"We can't," Slack answered flatly. "There ain't a hoss livin' that'd tackle that cranky crick, an' if he did he couldn't get up that straight bank acrost."

"Well, I'm danged!" Red objurgated.

"There's nothin' for it but to go back to Peloo's," Slack said resignedly.

"An' get the laugh throwed into us good an' plenty," Meekins contributed. "Peloo'd be in bed, an' everythin' shut up."

"We got to go," Slack persisted.

"I ain't goin' back six miles like a danged fool!" Red declared. "Goin' back there means boozin'. I been off the liquor for three months 'cept to-night, an' I ain't going to take a chanst. We'd have to wait two or three days, p'r'aps, an' I got to be on my claim to-morrer."

"How're you goin' to get there?" Slack asked sarcastically.

"By ridin' the trail through Keewatin Pass, that's how! 'Tain't more'n four miles farder."

Meekins swung his horse as he said this. Slack turned his mount and in silence rode at the other's side. At the mouth of Devils Pass Slack checked his steed, saying:

" 'Tain't much use goin' in there. A feller's jus' as like to hit the wrong trail an' fetch up at Loon Lake."

"Thought you wasn't feared of 'em squaw stories," Red sneered.

"I ain't feared of nothin' no more'n you are," Slack retorted angrily; "but I don't want to go moonin' round like a stray goat jus' for the fun of the thing."

"Well, I'm goin' to the Big Pine to-night by this trail!" Red declared. "All I got to do is keep

bearin' to the lef' an' come out inter Kettle Valley; then it's as good as a sidewalk to the Big Pine. If you want to go back to Peloo's, Slack, jus' tell 'em that the air up in these hills kinder made your lungs ache an' you didn't care to tackle it. Don't say nothin' about the ghosts, or they'll laugh at you."

"Of all the danged fellers to be sot in their way that I ever see, you've got 'em skinned both ways of the jack, Mr. Meekins! You're wussin' a kid, an' I'm goin' to play the fool humourin' you. Shove along, an' we'll see who's afeared an' who's a dang——"

But Meekins had slipped into the gloom of the pass; for the moon had now dipped behind the barrier of Keewatin Hills and the penciled line of the trail had blurred to nothing.

With heads low hung in the freedom of slacked rein the horses sought the trail with cautious stride. Sometimes a stone clinked a metallic note from the iron shoes; sometimes a quickened rush told of a muskeg stretch; sometimes a rocky wall brushed leg or arm as the path they rode looped some sharp point; but always they drove into a deeper gloom which lay in heaviness upon their hearts. Strange broken fragments of the organ's wail came hauntingly to Meekins in the sombre stillness of the gorge. Once Slack's horse misplaced a hoof and floundered on the giving edge of a cut bank, and, startled, he cried out in sudden fear; then he coughed and swore to reassert his nerve.

"Kinder dark," Red threw back; "but in a mile

she'll hit the open. I been through here wunst."

The uplift of the horses' backs told that they climbed a heavy grade. A wind blew in their faces now; it chilled as though beyond lay snow.

"We're gettin' there," Red called back to Slack. "I'm gettin' ol' Keewatin's breath."

"I wisht he was gettin' a punch in the face!" Slack muttered to himself. "I'd like to give him one."

Soft wailing strains came from the pine boughs overhead as the wind cut through their wirelike screen. Afraid, Slack rode with nerves as vibrant as though he dangled over a precipice. He almost screamed in agony when something, perhaps a startled wolf, fled in noisy haste across their path. The horses snorted. They too seemed on the edge of fear.

"I was a fool to come inter these danged hills!" Slack muttered.

Red spoke to his horse some needless word, as though he sought a change to the silent strain.

Gradually, imperceptibly, the wind grew stronger as they rode the hill. The music of the pines was now one lengthened hum, as though bees hung on every limb.

"We're on top, Slack," Red advised, as their horses flattened to level going. "This gully is on the divide; then we dip down into the valley."

"This wind's blamed strong!" Slack growled. "She blows through here like a funnel."

"This cut ain't more'n ten feet wide, that's why,"

Red explained, "an' the sides is about three hun'red feet up. Guess this is where the gold is—or p'r'aps the ghosts."

Slack shivered, and exclaimed, for the horses had checked after the stiff climb, "Push on, ol' man, I'm about sick of this dungeon!"

Their way lay over stones which caused their mounts to flounder as they rode. They left behind the heavier gloom of the lower hills, and some reflected moonlight crept through the gorge.

A hundred yards beyond the narrow cleft was ended by an amphitheatre; it was like a colosseum. On its edge Red checked his horse to say:

"There's two or three openin's leads from this. I guess ours is the fu'st one on the left."

His words echoed back from the encircling walls. The sound caused Slack to say:

"The wind's died out all of a suddent."

His voice was cut by a demoniac scream which died away in a low wailing note of anguish. Slack felt his scalp twitch. A cold chill crept up his back, and on his forehead beads of perspiration clung cold and clammy. The horses stood in trembling fright.

"What's that, Red? My God! What——"

The wailing note which had sunk to nothing came again, faint, growing in strength, until at the pitch of a scream it was smothered by a roaring medley, as though huge fiends fought in the arena of the encircling walls.

Slack's horse, terror stricken, or perhaps the man,

drunk with fear, drove with unconscious hand, galloped off to the left and through the first opening in the rocky barrier.

Red's horse plunged and fought against the pull of his rider's hands. Fighting they struggled across the amphitheatre with its wailing cries. Through another cleft in the rocks the horse sought for escape. Struggling, trying to check the frightened beast, Red was smashed against a jutting rock which caught a leg and swept him from the saddle, where he lay stunned by the fall.

He lay for a long time crumpled up among the boulders. The gray light of dawn crept in through the creviced rock, and when he opened his eyes wearily it was day.

Half stupid, the wailing voices of the rocks threw him back all the hours since he had left the house of Peloo. "Say, Peloo," he muttered, drowsily, "I'm sick of that tune! Tell Tomato to stop playin' the melojun."

Returning consciousness told him all the hard, bitter facts, brushed away the cobwebs from his unnerved brain. He looked out on the cold gray rocks, and then the memory of his horse, the ride up the hill, the fight for lost control, the crashing fall, came back in jostling sequence. And all the time the heavy roar, the wailing, vibrant note, alternated with sudden times of quiet.

Red tried to rise. With a cry of pain he fell back. One leg lay useless, wrenched somewhere. As he lay helpless his mind took up the vivid things

of the night, pondering all the many whys and hows. It was a time to think, a good chance for a slow working mind to solve problems.

After a long time he chuckled; then he swore softly. "I jus' got to lay here till Slack hikes back to find out why I ain' comin'," he said to an unobtrusive rock that nestled at his shoulder; "but I got these sounds kinder sorted out. Guess I been dumped right in the Injuns' ghost factory."

He gazed long and contemplatively at a sharp wedge of rock, V shaped, that broke the circled wall to his left.

"It's the wind," he soliloquized. "This danged hole's built kinder like an organ—wuss'n Peloo's." Even as he spoke the wind, which blew in fitful gusts, split by the trident rock, cried out in pain, its echoes booming from the other wall. "Yes, 'em's the ghosts," he said conclusively. "It's dang like that thing Tomato played, too!"

His own words suggested to Meekins a startling new line of thought. At first it was too subtle and tentative for expression. Shortly he worked it out, and slowly.

"I've got it!" he muttered after a time. "That lost gold mine is here somewheres. That greasy breed found it, got scared out, an' was tellin' Lamonte how to find it by these wind noises. Lamonte writ it down to kinder remember it, so he'd know when he come to the spot. (Wisht Slack'd come. My leg's painin' like——) Then that fool breed gets crazy, an' is sorry for givin' up the secret, or

was sorry he gave away about the gold, or somethin', pumps a bullet inter Lamonte, an' steals the paper back. That's what!"

At the end of an hour the unearthly music had ceased; the craterlike opening in the rocks was quiet and restful as a cavern should be.

Red explained this phenomenon to his friend the boulder. "The wind's died out or shifted, I guess."

As Meekins idly scanned the rocky wall at his back he suddenly gave a cry of startled joy. A two-foot vein of white quartz showed little splashes of bright yellow where the peeping sun threw a shaft of light on its face. He squirmed over on his side, drew a knife from his pocket, and picked at one of these.

"By hokey, it's gold!" he said in an awed voice. "I've found the Lost Mine, sure as shootin'!"

Then he lay gazing in quiet content at the vein of richness. For another hour he lay waiting for the advent of relief, his patience due entirely to his inability to perform otherwise. Then the ring of ironed hoofs on the stony path raised a medley of echoes from the resonant walls. Slack's voice boomed in giant tones. Some other man that rode with him laughed, and myriad fiends cackled in this freakish place of noise.

"Wisht I had a foghorn to try this out," Red joked at himself, his spirits lightened by the coming relief.

From where he lay Meekins saw a horse's head poke through the narrow inlet on the right. "I'll

give her one boost," he chuckled, "an' touch up Slack's nerve, jus' for fun."

With that he bellowed like a bull, and wild beasts seemed to fill the arena with their rage. Red saw the riders check their horses in dismay and peer about the place in sudden fear.

"Guess I'd best not get too gay," he muttered. "Slack'll bolt." He hardly raised his voice above a whisper as he called, "Here I am, Slack. Yours truly, Red Meekins."

Reassured, Slack pushed his horse into the huge potlike place and, sighting Meekins, slipped from the saddle.

"Hope you had your breakfast, Bill," Red observed ironically.

"I come soon's I saw you wasn't turnin' up," Slack offered in extenuation of his delay. "Are you hurted?"

"My left leg's on strike an' won't walk none," Meekins answered. "Glad you knowed enough to bring that spare hoss."

"I rounded up Dave here to come along an' help look for you," Slack contributed in the way of further extenuation. "We'll lift you to the saddle now. Can you sit a hoss with your sore leg?"

"Soon's I've finished a little business I come here for to transact," Red answered quaintly. He winked at Dave as he asked, "Slack, you're workin' for me by the day, ain't you?"

"I allow I am."

"But on this extra occasion that don't go,"

Meekins said. He pointed a finger at the rocky wall across the narrow cleft and added, "Jus' stake that vein of quartz carryin' free millin' gold in the name of Meekins, Slack & Co. Then we'll get back to camp. I'm kinder hungry. Guess we'll call her the Ghost Mine."

THE END